

ia

L. H. Davis

THE HOUSE OF BROKEN DREAMS :  
A MEMORY

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# *The House of Broken Dreams*

*A Memory*

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By

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*The Author of "Litanies of Life"*

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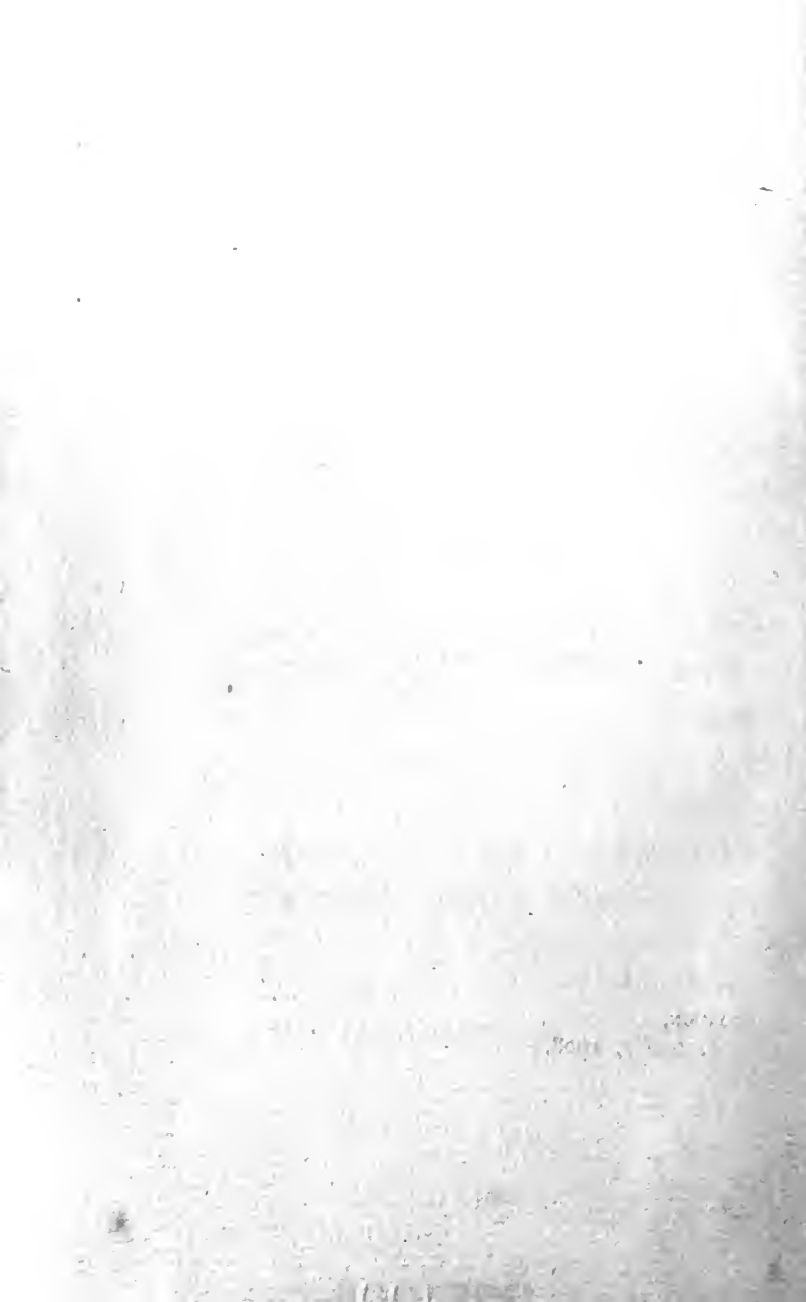
To

BEATRICE

*"Near, or far,  
Here, or beyond!"*

LONDON,  
*September, 1908.*

2214995





# The House of Broken Dreams

*From an Australian Garden*

IT was in the morning, towards noontide, when you came. The dawn flushed across a beauteous world where soft airs blew ; the breath of violets was everywhere ; crystal dewdrops sparkled on the lawn ; the birds sang in merry chorus from the bougainvillea outside our window. And it was, oh, how heavenly dear and glad the day !

Soft footsteps moved in the shadowy room, kind hands fulfilled their gentle offices, and presently your little lonely cry rang out, the cry of the firstborn, whose music is for the mother's heart

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alone. A passion of welcome greeted you, and I think your little rosy body must have felt the warmer for that enfolding atmosphere of love. How do those tiny creatures manage whose arrival is considered a catastrophe of the direst kind, who are held against no mother's milky breast, who, directly the occasion comes, are transplanted to some alien soil, to wither or perchance to thrive—the misery of their ineffective entrance notwithstanding?

At the first blush, it seems as if only the divinest care and love can keep these frail blossoms alive at all, as if the first breath of untoward wind would blow their tiny lamp of life for ever out, as if an ungentle thought even would suffice to slay them. But the slums of Europe and America, the deserts of Africa, the

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bazaars of Asia, have another tale to tell :  
and the wail of babies who cannot die,  
yet whom no one wants to love or care  
for, is heard the whole world over.

But you, Mine, the room was full of  
sweet whispers at your coming, and the  
burden of them all was this : “ Lift up  
your heart, lift up your heart, LIFT UP  
YOUR HEART.” And other joys were as  
though they had not been, other griefs  
too, in the wondrous, unnameable bliss  
of having you.

“ The babe by its mother  
Lies bathed in joy,  
Glide its hours uncounted—  
The sun is its toy ;  
Shines the peace of all being,  
Without cloud, in its eyes,  
And the sum of the world  
In soft miniature lies.”

And those baby days that seemed so

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long in the actual passing, looking back upon them, one can only see the cruel swiftness with which they fled. Soon that early bloom is lost : bitterly soon the baby is the child, the child the boy, the boy the youth, the youth the man. There were things that I wanted to but did not tell you, you were such a child. And lo ! when I thought again to speak them, Mine, you were old, too old to hear. A woman cannot tell her boy brave things too soon : if from laziness, ennui, disinclination, or any other cause, she puts the doing of this simple duty off, her loss is only equal to what her gain would have been had she reversed her method.

All of which reminds me somehow of that little bald baby-head of yours where the curls were so long in growing. Yet

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when they came and clustered round it, waxing beautiful and strong, so soon we had to cut them off—at the brink where babyhood and boyhood meet. In those days I used to think I would record those of your tiny sayings that seemed most of value in a little book kept for the purpose. But the book was never written. For you did not savour of the infant prodigy : your remarks were merely sweet, honest, common as the daylight. Stars and flowers and fairies were the shrines before which your baby soul prostrated itself most fervently : a little later on, fluffy kittens, beautiful ladies of high degree, bright clothes, ponies, all had their turns of preference and passionate devotion.

I notice how many women are fearful and over-anxious about the appearance of

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their children : how they spend golden hours starching, ironing, fashioning their little garments and gain thereby the name of excellent good mother ; but how it would never for a moment occur to them to toil less at material objects and guide the tiny mind to the contemplation of things fairer than mud pies, of an earth and heaven tender with romance and story. Blessed indeed the woman whose fingers are worn for her children's sake ; but blessed with a special blessing, she who called them out to find fairies' homes in the mosses soft and cool, the faces of friends in the stars so deep and bright, brave thoughts in the flowers of tender hues.

I HAVE heard it said how much finer a thing is peace than happiness. To me there was never peace like that of your babyhood. I have only to be again in memory in that firelit room where you lay gurgling on my knee, with the silver kettle bubbling and the kitten purring to the murmur of the flames—and the apotheosis of peace is there. Or in the garden where you slept with the violets breathing perfume round you, and the leaves and blossoms as they fell without sound about your hammock. Were I to live a thousand lives I should never know a deeper peace than that of those wondrous hours. At the time I did not know it,

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but now, on looking back, it is as though one had come from a strange wilderness to an oasis fair beyond dreams or words, and that the great Commander had there called "Halt!" while all the forces of life stood still, marvelling much at the tenderness of those pleasant places where the leaves of the trees were indeed for the healing of the nations.

The shadow fell when you were five years old and your father went away. The pain that followed, each could hardly have borne had it not been for the other. How we loved him, you and I! When he was some months gone a letter came from him to the effect that he would not come back again . . . as in peace, so in pain we were together, you and I, alone, inseparable, understanding with a perfect



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understanding, babyhood and motherhood consoling one another as they two ever and only can.

But even at this distance of time and place I find I cannot write of these things. My pen, it might slip from my control. I have as little desire to be discursive on this point as I have to be morbid or hysterical. Agony of soul is a terrible factor in life, as real as sunshine or as rain, and for the bearing of it each one must in patience and in silence fashion his own equipment. There are agonies which no sympathy can reach, just as there are sicknesses beyond the care and cure of mortal surgeon.

Was it at this time, my darling, that the garden ways grew suddenly so solemn, the wild winds harsher, the falling of the leaves so hopeless? How often, then,

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your little hand without a word sought  
mine and clung there closely till the heart  
of me was almost persuaded to sing again !

So the menace of the years grew fainter,  
and the sound of your little running feet  
would arouse one from dreams where  
only desolation was. I never liked to  
think of unkindness or injustice coming  
near you. All ahead lay the awakening  
to strife and manhood and bitter days :  
now was this heavenly sheltered span of  
childhood, of deep, unbroken calms, of  
innocence and perpetual wondering—by  
and by the hardness to be endured, the  
untoward influences to be reckoned with,  
the illusions one by one to part from.

“Mother, I am thy little son—

Why dost thou sigh ?

*Hush ! for the shadow of the years*

*Stoopeth more nigh !*

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Mother, I am thy little son—

The night comes on apace,  
When all God's waiting stars shall smile  
On me in thy embrace.

*Oh, hush thee! I see black starless night!*

*Oh, couldn't thou slip away*

*Now, by the hawthorn hedge of Death—*

*And get to God by Day!"*

WHAT a little boy you were for stories! Froissart, Robin Hood, King Arthur's Knights—it was all one to you if only from the safe shelter of home and mother's arms you could look into the wild, bright eyes of danger and dare as the heroes did of long ago. Strangely enough, even then it was always the little mother who was to be protected from dangers, seen and unseen, and the greatest games of all were those in which a lion or a tiger was to rush out at her, and you with your tin sword at hand to slay it gloriously. How near those dear days seem! The shadows on the grass, the thrush upon the peach-tree, the very

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oranges gleaming gold amid the sombre foliage, they are close enough for me to touch them. The murmur of the sweet wind brushing over fruit and flower, the scent of the freesias and the violet, the gladness of the sunlight on the garden ways, they are mine to-day as ever they were then.

We stood at the gate of Gethsemane, you and I and Susan, on the day we left our garden where the velvet lawns lay like a sweet green secret with towering shrubs and creepers and dainty flowers growing thickly all around, hiding it from the world beyond; a beautiful reserve, enclosing so fair a thing within, a mystery with a rose at the heart of it.

Economy, that not unkindly step-mother, bade us do this thing. I wanted to have plenty of money for your educa-

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tion later on. I wanted to see the wide world with you. I wanted to be by your side when first your eyes should open to the stories, the stones and skies of other lands. Should you choose some special service or calling for you own, I wanted not to have you go down or fail for lack of means as so many have done before. Where one arrives at last who started with the proverbial penny in his fist, a thousand others are swallowed up for all time in the cruelties and chances of the game. I wanted to take no risks in this which was my life to me. God alone may know if I was right or wrong. To this end we let our home upon the plains for a term of years, and in obedience to a doctor's wish came to a highland place where a little cottage was, set high upon a hill.

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Nor hedge nor gate was there. The garden ran into the wild, open, aromatic bush. All the little world, if it was so minded, could gaze at the open curtained windows by day and note at night in which room a light shone and in which darkness held possession. In three days' time the use and purpose of every one of the five rooms was known to the entire village. The utter lack of privacy at first staggered us, then amused us ; finally we accepted, even welcomed it, and presently forgot to sigh for the deep solitudes and silences of the ways of our home below. We too grew interested in the busy life that went on, without haste, without rest, around us : the woodcutter at work upon a giant tree ; the big wagons drawing up at the "store" ; the widow Crozier pruning and tying up her long rows of currant

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and raspberry bushes with such beautiful precision and despatch ; Jones the carpenter adding two rooms to his bush abode in anticipation of the coming of his bride ; Miss Franks, the lonely elderly teacher of music and other accomplishments, doing her chores by stealth when the pupils were away. And then the things of the wild world itself—the little lark of summer soaring from the lowly grasses to the clouds, the velvet button of the first mushroom in the dewy fields of morning, the first cluster of coral fern in the gully, the first blackberry ripe and shining on the hedgerow—how we watched and waited and sang for joy when at last we found them !

And so little by little, more and more, we grew to love our life.

Twenty miles distant from our village,



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which crowns the top of a range of lofty hills that sweep round in a crescent, lies the capital city of the State. In the daytime, when storms or golden glories of leaf and valley fill the distance between these two, no sign, save occasionally that of a thin grey veil, is vouchsafed to the dwellers on the heights of the city, warm and palpitating far below : but at night, when darkness rolls in like a mighty tide to fill the gulf between, long chains of lights gleam like jewels on the far horizon and speak in no uncertain voice to those of the high-lying places. This consolation of the darkness, this mystic link between the clamour of man's world and the peace of that of God's, rarely fail either to touch the heart or inspire the mind. One falls to wondering if in the daytime they of the city, when they look

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from some point of vantage on to these far green hills which at night are hidden from their sight, feel also the interest, longing, curiosity, which possess us of the remoter places as night by night we watch the beacons of the city flashing forth.

For you and me this was a picture we never tired of. You used to climb on a chair and stand behind me with your arms around my neck, and together we would look through the miles of velvet gloom whose extremest edge would suddenly be patterned in wondrous, vivid, quivering points of gold. Then we would turn to each other and smile in wordless happiness ; for all the pictures of the day were never quite as this one of the night—so full of mystery, enchantment, promise, and surprise. What was down there

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under those serene and steadfast lamps, by that distant altar spread with glowing tapers for the nightly sacrifice? Was it little children weeping for a mother gone before? Was it little flower girls aching, footsore, and very short of pence? Was it a birthday feast, with cakes and presents and games of glorious report? Was it a letter which said that a father long away was coming home again? Oh! the stories being told under the lamps down there—each night a new one, each night the old ones over again.

And yet for all the stories which the stones of cities could unfold, these silent places by the eucalyptus forests and the springs which sparkle down the fern-crowned gullies—surely they are the fit setting for the austerer realities of mankind. The wind among the tree-tops

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is their dirge ; the glory of leaf and sky and shade their anthem holy ; the wattle gold of spring, the later pageant of fruit and flower, their march triumphal ; the snows, the winter snows, the kindly pall that hides and hushes, that covers all at last so fairly.

Thus, with love at the hearth, music in the room, the wilderness without gay with flowers, life went not uncomforted or brokenly altogether. The very names around us smelt well and were good to speak — Olinda, Sassafras, Dandenong, Ferntree Gully. To drive over the hills down into Paradise Valley, through miles of blossoming orchards and giant ferns, past Aura, Emerald, Cockatoo and Gembrook, set indeed as a diamond by the crystal waters, was a lesson in the study

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of words such as is not learned in the schools of men. What memories were to be yours, to take with you into the busy world of cities, when the time was ripe, what store of freshness and delight to keep your heart from fainting ever ! For those were the days when you loved every minute of your life.

Oh ! little cottage, set high upon the hill, how true indeed it is that the greater part of service is never paid for. I can pay for the tiny rent of you, but not for the peace and love that sheltered under your steep red roof and spoke from your honest face. I have watched you from every side and never a corner of you that was not good to see. In the star-shine, with the sparkling silent snows folding you round and round, you move my heart to issues that may not be

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spoken. In the radiant stillness of those summer mornings, newborn of joy and dew and colour indescribable, it still is all the world to me to know that in the distance you are there, dainty within and dear without, ready for shelter or for shade, the fairy stronghold which has our joint lives in its keeping. In the evening, as I walk abroad, when the wide world sleeps so softly and the music of choirs invisible melts over the mountain tops, when littlenesses fade away, life is supreme, and pain for a little while lies lost in bliss—even so, I love to turn from my vantage point and see you dimly in the moonlight or the starshine there. Suddenly I know that I must run, run back to the shelter of your walls as though to some loved open arms, and listen to my little boy breathing there, a music sweeter than

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that of all the spheres. For human things are so terribly dear and hold with a magic and a might that the merely spiritual may hardly know.

Two years after we made our home upon the hill-top a cruel summer-end scourged the land for miles around. The heat was as a fierce hidden monster whom no one can go forth and do battle with, but who from some mysterious ambush sits and laughs at the miseries he sows around. For three weeks day followed night and night day without the least tempering of the brazen glow. Water was scarce, food and sleep nearly impossible, nerves at a tension, and sickness rife. But out of distress came health. The common trouble brought a host of common kindnesses in its train. Surely

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never were people so generous and full of sympathy before, and worthily you took your place among the smaller helpers there. Early in the morning, with a broad-brimmed hat on your head, you used to run down to the spring in the gully with a large can to fill for Miss Franks, who was prostrate. Then you would carry the newspaper and her letters to her, and after breakfast run through the bush to the schoolhouse, a mile away, for your lessons.

On one of these days we arranged that after school you should go out of your way to bring home some honey, for Susan to make honey scones where-with to tempt our difficult appetites.

It was about four of the afternoon. I was sewing in the airless room, with blinds drawn against the relentless glare,



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awaiting your home-coming. I remember that a great longing had hold of me to have you back. It was so blindly, cruelly hot that I was afraid for my little boy that some injury might happen to him. Every few minutes I laid down my work and stepped out on the verandah and stood in the fierce blazing silence looking down the path by which you should come. Not a cloud moved : not a leaf stirred. Nothing in nature whispered that the hour would soon be "dumb with untold calamity." Suddenly—it all seemed to happen in a flash—I heard children shouting, running, men dashing by, a wild fear in their breathless, broken words. "Fire ! Fire ! The bush is on fire !"

For a moment the world reeled around me ; then with a cry to Susan I flew towards the furnace through

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which I knew that you would pass. I seem to remember people crying "Stop!" The air was heavy with smoke which stung one's eyes cruelly : the roar and crackling of the fire was like the thunder of waves on an iron shore. I saw and heard these things dimly, as in a mist ; all the time the only thing I really saw was your despairing little body caught in this trap of flame and death. At present the path was just clear, but the meeting of the fiery arch overhead would only be a matter of a few minutes. Giants of the forest, hoary with the memories of centuries, died royally that day, their burning arms outstretched in unavailing prayer or protest. A spark blew towards me, and in a twinkling the light muslin gown I wore was all ablaze. I had to

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stop and tear it from me and the thought that I should die before I found you froze my heart within me. I tried to call you, but no sound came. Hares, rabbits, lizards, things innumerable, tortured and distraught, rushed before me. Once a great black snake hissed defiance almost at my feet. A few steps farther and the rest of my clothing was on fire. I tore every vestige from me, yet did not know, or knowing did not care, that I was naked, naked from crown to sole. Sparks, driven by the hot gale, fell continually on my bare flesh and stung me to a frenzy of fear that I should die before I found you.

Indeed, in those moments I tasted death, and the bitterness of it would be unbelievable to those who were never

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in like case. My life, lit up with love down the days gone by and for those to come, was to be mine no more, but in this fiery furnace was to go out like a spent spark. Though if only I might not die till I had found you! I think the passion of that prayer must have pierced the floor of heaven and flown at last to the heart of the Most High. It is the second prayer of my life which has been answered in heavenly measure.

For suddenly you were there in the pathway, crying, "Mother, oh, mother dear!" . . . And your face and your eyes were the face and the eyes of your father.

\* \* \* \* \*

Not a hurt came near you on that dreadful day, but for long weeks after-

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wards I had to lie down helplessly with my hands and arms swathed in bandages: though no one could have died, I think, with devotion such as yours to keep them living. We had a trained nurse from the city, and Sister Nora, as her name was, made the cottage gay from dawn till eve with her badinage, slang, and dear Irish ways. She used to look at you quizzically, then exclaim grandly—

“Oh, you, Eric John Calendar, with your wondering eyes, your proud mouth, and your merry heart! What is the secret of you then? For I will swear there is a secret, and if my kingdom was worth a twopenny, yes, a twopenny marble, you should have it, and welcome, for the telling.” Then you would grow rosy and run away from her in shy amaze.

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Or it would be myself on whom the light of her eyes would fall in gay and tender questioning—

“Listen!” she said one evening as we sat alone. “There is something on your mind these days, not the big troubles of which one does not speak, but one of the little horrid corroding things that fret and fret and fret. Oh, don’t I know them! The atmosphere of the sick-room is so confoundedly conducive to their growth.”

“Witch! Fairy! Sprite!”

“Not one of them. Just Nora, Sister Nora.”

“Yes; it’s such a stupid little thing too, really not a thing to waste words over at all.”

“But they always are. Don’t I know them!”

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“Yet, as you say, against my will, as I lie here, I think of it and it frets me. It was on that dreadful day. I think it is the reason why I hate to speak of that day at all. You remember, I met Eric near the edge of the blazing wood. There was no going back by the way I had come: it was like a river of fire in full tide, so we fled towards the schoolhouse. As we dashed from the burning bush into the open road where safety was at last, a man, the schoolmaster, was standing at the playground fence. He stared at us both without understanding for a minute. Then he said: ‘Come in quickly, I see how it is with you.’ And as I made to pass in at the little gate, he whispered, so low that I feel sure Eric did not hear: ‘Oh, you beauty, you beauty!’ With that

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I cowered to the ground and fell fainting by the fence. Eric dashed off to get a sheet which was hanging from a line close by and he hid my nakedness. But I trust and think he did not hear the insult which scorched deeper than flame into the burnt body. That is all, dear nurse. Such a little silly tale. But it hurts!"

"Tell me. If you had not gone that day for Eric through the wood, would he have come home to you through the fire?"

"So it seems—straight through the fire. He was just making up his mind for the plunge. Of course he did not know how bad it was farther on, but he was coming through."

"And would have been inevitably caught in the burning trap and killed?"



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“Inevitably, yes. It seems so.”

“Then never let the thought of what you told me just now hurt you for a moment’s space again. Thank God instead that you had a child for whose sake, not only your body, but your soul was scorched. So many women would die for their child who have not even one to live for.”

“Nora! Sister Nora! I love your voice: it is kind as the night itself. And the thing it says is best of all.”

“Ah! yes. But I cannot let you off your gruel. Really I cannot. ‘Remember, Nurse, the strength must be thoroughly maintained’—can’t you hear him saying it?”

And her mimicry was never in better form.

Afterwards she wheeled me out to see

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the starshine on the wattle, which was all in bloom around us, so that I might, as she said, go to sleep on quiet thoughts and a tender vision.

You were there, deep in that nightly story-book of yours, the starry sky.

"There must be a birthday feast among the angels to-night," said Sister Nora. "Look at the candles that are lit."

"A candle for every year. What a terribly old angel it must be!" you sighed.

"I will never try my tongue at poetry again," flashed Nora. "It is always the same: when my real self for a moment escapes me, it is instantly crushed."

That slow, bewildered smile grew on your face, the smile of a child who

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wonders why its elders use so many needless words. It always seems to me a dearer thing than the smile of instant comprehension that comes with later years.

That night we thought we were in Eden, so rich with calm and fragrance it was, underneath the faint-white jewel-sewn sky, in that high green garden among the gold dust of the silver wattle. For the fire had spared one side of the mount entirely.

A mountain, a garden, and a home—it is the trinity more to be desired of the children of men than much fine gold.

By this time we had built a fence round our home. Suddenly in the gloom of the bush a step sounded and the latch of the gate was lifted. "It

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is the schoolmaster," you said, and I remember that you came at once to my chair, as we remember little things sometimes when the larger ones have slipped from our ken for ever.

Nora hastened down the path to meet him. "Yes?" she questioned.

"Good evening. It is Mrs. Calendar I want to see. I hear she is nearly quite well again. I have no time in the day to call."

"Mrs. Calendar is almost convalescent, but she cannot see any strangers yet. She has not recovered from the shock. I am very sorry."

"Oh!" he said, waving Nurse aside, "just a few words, surely, just a handshake! There she is on the verandah with her boy, is she not?"

"Yes, she is there, but I cannot let

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you see her. Indeed, I am very sorry. It will be some time before she will be able to see strangers."

And Nora, it seems, smiled her most brilliant smile, and stood with arms akimbo in the little path. They measured glances for a moment in the gloom. Then the schoolmaster said curtly—

"Ah, well! To him who waits! Kindly give Mrs. Calendar my sympathy and best regards. Good evening."

And sister Nora, coming thoughtfully and slowly up the path, remarked softly with a sigh after the latch had fallen—

"There goes another of the men who will never marry me. There is such a vast procession of them now."

I NOTICE how often people, and those not in special agony of soul or body, carelessly say they wish the day were done. There is no beauty, it would seem, in the blue hours as they shine, then softly go out one by one for all time ; their passing is a matter for thanksgiving ; work and worry and the fret of mean things are so heavy and so close that nothing else is seen or felt, and the whisper of the world falls on unheeding or impatient ears.

I am glad now to think that I do not remember, then, a single day at the end of which we smiled that it was done. Each day, maybe, had its sob

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deep down within the heart, but the dear fact that we were alive and well and that we had each other laid lesser longings low. A poet says in fair words what the multitude dimly and dumbly feels without quite knowing it. Our prayer in those days was perhaps—

“Teach us delight in simple things  
And mirth that has no bitter springs,  
Forgiveness free of evil done  
And love to all men 'neath the sun !”

A passion for astronomy, a fierce hatred of cruelty, an absorbing delight in gardening were points that no one who knew you could for a moment have missed. I do not know if these are boyish or manly qualities. I am afraid, perhaps, they are not—quite. Boys love to pull off flies' wings and cut worms

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in two, stars and clouds do not trouble them in the least, and gardening is "jolly rotten work." My plea would be that when we are natural surely then we are best. Why should a little boy hurt insects because most boys do, when all his instincts are set in another way?

To see a horse or a dog ill-treated spelt hours of misery for you; to watch the moon climbing over the hilltop, threading her delicate way through the fleecy clouds and up the starry steep, and to learn something of her story and her work, was what you never tired of; to see the fronds and tassels of the new ferns bursting through the snow, the green promise of the harvest shimmering over the torn and tortured earth, and the tiny seeds of your own sowing unfolding at last into little gems of



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grace and colour, inspired in you the same ecstasy of gladness that parties, pantomimes, and picnics do in other boys, I fancy. But, O Mine, if after all theirs was the more excellent way !

Sometimes I thought you brought home a solemn little face from school. But we told each other everything : there could be no small trouble not known to me. One such day I asked you if the world went well with you. Gradually I gathered that it was the schoolmaster who harassed your little life in some inexplicable way, so intangibly, so imperceptibly, that until directly questioned you could not have given voice or form to the matter. He would blame or bully without any reason ; with even less he would on occasion praise and flatter, and this, it seems, was

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harder to bear than that. In fact, he singled you out especially for small pricks and attentions of one kind or another according to the mood or whim of the moment. And I, whose every effort was to the end that your mind should be steeped in just and comely ways, I had no weapon in all my armoury wherewith to fight this elusive hidden foe.

“ Oh, mother dear, as if it mattered ! Why did you get it out of me like that ? I suppose I must pay some little bit for all the jolly times. He can't touch Saturdays or Sundays or the holidays. Oh, mother, just let him rip ! ”

I remembered the different times when the schoolmaster had called and how on one pretext or another I had invariably

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excused myself from seeing him. These little poor things, do they mean, after all, so much in life?

"The next time he calls, Eric, he must come in," I told you.

"No such beastly thing, mother! I'd have to be extra civil to him then, and all my gorge gets up at the thought of him inside here with us even for a second. He has a brazen cheek to call at all where he must see he's thoroughly not wanted."

"Dear, if he is fit to teach you he is fit to come inside the house. I really never thought of it like this."

"No, and never do again. Do you think our jolly evenings are ever going to be made discontented on his rotten account?"

"Eric!"

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“ Mother ! ”

Then the room rang with our laughter, and alas ! we were unashamed. The little sin was sweet. We enjoyed it with something of the wild and fearful joy that trembles in a child's heart when he holds a stolen flower or pear. Have you quite forgotten, Mine ?

ERIC,—In this record of the years, which in some far distant day your children's eyes may see, I have made no mention of Susan, Susan who was with us always, in good fortune and in poor, Susan of whom it would be hard to say how much she loved us, thought for us, and did for us, she who knew nothing of books and "learning," but vastly much of men, women, babies, and the things of the home. You could only have been ten or eleven years old when, by reason of her constancy, you christened her the polar star "of whose true-fixed and resting quality there is no fellow in the firmament."

## The House of

When you are a grown man I think you will remember what a wonder of self-training she was. Friendly but not familiar, following us in everything and everywhere with a perfect allegiance, never under any circumstances sympathising with herself, not given to chattering; when a smile could do instead of a word, the smile was always there.

You and I, who continually read dear things together, do you remember, one day, how we met those words of Dante—

“Yea, thou shalt learn how salt his food who  
fares

Upon another's bread, how steep his path  
Who treadeth up and down another's stairs?”

We were in the garden. It was a Sunday morning and the world was full of peace and sunshine. Susan was with-

## Broken Dreams

in, busying with the meal, and as we read we halted to think each the same thought. That by any token that kind and loyal soul should find her food salt or an inch of the path steep because of us was not to be borne indeed.

The colour, depth, and inspiration that may be in the written word! The lines fashioned long ago by a master-hand in an old Italian city came winging their way across ocean, desert, forest, field, to a bush-garden of Australia and floated round, transmuted into living gold, in the sunshine of a far country.

For thirteen years and more her feet had gone to and fro unweariedly for us—were we careless of her loving-kindness? We hardly thought so, but there might be things, one could never tell.

“Mother!” you cried to me, your

## The House of

dear boy's face instinct with eagerness and joy, "let her come in and have all her meals with us. Often when I go through to the kitchen, she's sitting with a cup of tea over the fire, and when I ask her where her dinner is, she says she doesn't feel like any. I'll bet you she's thinking of her dead husband and child or some rotten business like that. Oh, mother, do! Dear old Polar (tell those little children this was your name for her) with us at every meal—it'll be just the shiny shilling!"

Thenceforth Susan's snowy cap and interested smile at one end of the table were the daily order, and her appetite improved so much that she grew quite anxious for the contours of her comfortable figure, and declared at times that nothing but her own kitchen would



## Broken Dreams

reduce her to respectable proportions again.

“But, ah me ! a meal with flowers, fine linen, and the loved one, made the hour sunny even if the sky was grey,” was Susan’s little epigram, she whose only learning was of the heart and eye, who in agony and tenderness had buried all her dead.

“Look, Susan,” I said to her one morning after breakfast, as she and I sat lingering alone between the sunshine and the fireglow, “if Mr. Smart, the schoolmaster, calls again, just let him in.”

“What ! him ? ” she queried, not well pleased.

This, of course, was my fault, so unconsciously do we colour each other’s lives and thoughts, though I hardly

## The House of

remember having mentioned his name to her before.

“It appears he has been behaving in an odd sort of way to Eric—possibly because he hasn’t been invited inside. It is a nuisance, but we have to do these things. We should have done this one before.”

She smiled dubiously but said no more.

“Susan, we have to be careful, living as we do so much together and alone, not to drift too far away from the normal point of view.”

“And what may that be, please ma’am?”

“Well, we mustn’t seem to avoid people, we mustn’t build a hedge of aloofness round about ourselves. We might begin to think we were better than our fellows, and disaster lies that way, as you would be the first to see. Perhaps

## Broken Dreams

that is why big men in books talk about the splendour of the normal and the commonplace.”

“I don’t see that you’re called upon to have that man inside if you don’t want to, not for all the fine words in the world ; no, I don’t.”

“Susan, but I do believe you’re right. Not for the sake of the words, then, silly words, nor for the sake of the matter—insignificant matter after all—but for Eric’s sake.

Her eyes shone suspiciously.

“For Master Eric’s sake. Why, ma’am, of course. What was we thinking about—in the dear Lord’s name, what was we thinking about ? ”

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I have met and heard of numberless women striving to keep young-hearted

## The House of

and young-looking for their lover's or their husband's sake, and sometimes I wonder, "Are there as many who try to do this for their child's sake?" I shiver at the thought that when you are twenty-two I shall be forty-four and so on. How many times we have discussed this situation together in its serious and its tragic aspects! At fifty I shall be so terribly old that all the time you can spare from work is presumably to be used in wheeling me from post to post in a bath-chair.

For me to say, "Eric, how big you are! Do run away. I want to be young for a few moments," was to touch the top note of such irony as we ever practised—though, indeed, I hear that irony (the real sort) and porridge are the two best ingredients on which to rear a family.

## Broken Dreams

“Tell us the story of the mother who was a bally rotter, dear!” you would say when we were skirting the shores of these subjects.

And Susan would echo you without shame: “Yes, please, ma’am, will you? I like it fine.”

“But, Susan, did you hear what he said? No one who is a mother must ever be called that.”

“But she *was*, dear,” you persisted.

Here it is then, in black and white, as short as may be, the story of a little French boy—the trinket child they called him. He was the only child of a wealthy beautiful young Parisian mother, and for six years he was part of her daily programme, much as her coiffeur, her jeweller, her horses—what you will. His point lace collars, his plumed hats, his satin suits,

## The House of

his shoes with their buckles of Rhinestone diamonds, were the subjects of as careful discussion and decision as her own toilets were. When he was eighteen months old gloves were made to his measure. In his fifth year he went to innumerable children's fancy balls, appearing variously as a tiny Henri III., as a magyar, as an Italian peasant, as an abbé of the time of Louis XV. In his sixth year the portrait painter of the day made a wonderful study of him, which was hung in the Salon. It was called "The White Child."

On a white bearskin stood the child with white silk draperies behind. He was clad in a white velvet suit, white shoes, and a large white felt hat with a cygnet's plume. He held a bunch of white lilies in one hand while

## Broken Dreams

the other rested on a large white Syrian hound.

“Poor little ass!” would come from your corner, with Susan nodding approval from hers.

The public went mad over this orgy of white, describing it as the supreme inspiration of genius, the painter received the cross of the Legion of Honour, and the young mother was in an ecstasy. Everywhere that it was possible to do so she took her child : in streets, shops, houses, at race meetings, public gatherings of all kinds, “first nights” even, people turned round exclaiming : “Ah, look ! there he is, the White Child with his mother.” Curiously enough, the White Child was never heard to laugh, and his smile was the rarest and some said the strangest thing seen.

## The House of

But he had reached the top of baby triumph; his little world was to ring with his baby name no more. Suddenly, one season, his small, bored, blasé face disappeared from the scene. It was noised abroad that he was growing fast, and was in the hands of a tutor. With the limelight no longer on him, he seems to have passed out of ken. But a few years later a sallow-faced, disconsolate schoolboy, at home for the week-end leave, sat alone in the great dining-room (his mother was not partial to schoolboys, and as a rule dined out on Saturdays and Sundays), before a multitude of untasted courses, looking at the picture of The White Child in its shining frame.

“Ah! but she really did care for me then, I think,” he said aloud. . . .



## Broken Dreams

“And the butler”—this, very gently,  
from Susan.

“Oh, yes, of course. And the butler  
slipped noiselessly from the room.”

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MY ERIC,—I come now to a page which I fain would not write at all. It is another of the things of which we do not speak either to Susan or to one another, unless by a random word in the rarest moment. And then a look, a flash of understanding that says more than all the words of all the world, and it is hushed again to silence. And my heart shivers, dear, to write of it. At the pity of it the blue day weeps and the night is full of terror.

One quiet shining noontide in the late spring, when for all its peace the air was charged with an indescribable freshness and vitality—later on I remember wonder-

## House of Broken Dreams

ing dimly at myself that I should take heed of its beauty—I said to Susan that I would go by the little path, as we always called it, through the bush to meet you as you came back for dinner.

Looking down through the long green vista with the golden tassels of the wattle embroidering the way on either hand, I stood still, thinking idly what a royal road to learning that sweet path made for the boy who ran along it every morning with his light heart and his heavy satchel.

Suddenly in the distance I saw some boys running. They were coming in my direction, but when they saw me they stopped. There were three of them, or it may have been four. Dick Cleeve, your chum, was there. I walked on slowly, wondering rather to see them, for I thought they lunched at the schoolhouse.

## The House of

When I reached them I was puzzled, they looked so solemn and confused. The other boys gave Dick a nudge. Dick looked at me with his beautiful dog's eyes as though he were asking pardon. Every moment is burnt on my brain in letters that no waters of forgetfulness can wash away.

"Mrs. Calendar," he said, "Eric has killed Albert Ross!"

Albert Ross—yes, of course; the bully, the boy who used to pinch the little boys till their arms were black if they did not hand over the choicest bits of their luncheon bags to him—Albert Ross, who made a little boy sit on an ants' nest till he was stung so cruelly that his small life was for a time despaired of—Albert Ross—yes, of course, Eric has——

## Broken Dreams

“What?” I stumbled. “Tell me, Dick, again.”

“Albert Ross’s dog had eaten up all his lunch, so to punish it he tied it up and held a lighted match to its nose. When Eric heard the dog shrieking he rushed up and said ‘Stop that this instant!’ but Albert only grinned and lit another match, and then Eric went for him, and at the first blow Albert’s head struck the corner of the wall, and he fell, and he’s dead.”

I ran on blindly by the same way by which three years before I had run through living fire to find you. This time it was an icy fear, a nameless dread, that held me, a feeling as of drowning waves that were closing in to suffocate and strangle. Oh, my dear, my little boy! What was it that they said?

## The House of

As I reached the schoolhouse road two men were coming towards me carrying something on a shutter, with a white cloth over it.

Had Albert Ross a mother too? Mary, pity women!

"'Twas fair enough, I fancy," said one of the men.

"All the same," said the other, "the chap what done it ought to get a few years in a reformatory to steady him down, and learn him not to take the blessed law into his hands like this."

I held my breath and glanced at him. His face was long, thin, narrow, and a fringe of ragged beard grew round it. I thought his eyes were cruel, but perhaps it was not so. I have not seen him since, but sometimes in stern sleep-

## Broken Dreams

less nights, when winds are wild, his face haunts me.

At the gate the schoolmaster met me.

"Something very dreadful has happened, Mrs. Calendar. You have already heard?"

"Yes, I know. Where is Eric?"

"In my room, under lock and key."

"Under lock and key?"

"Until the constable arrives. Then the matter will be no longer in my hands."

"I do not understand. It was purely an accident, an awful one but still an accident. Let me see Eric, let me see him quickly."

"Well, I hardly know. I almost think it would be best to wait until the trooper arrives. They have telephoned for him. He is in the valley to-day."

## The House of

“Mr. Smart, let me see my boy. He is not a prisoner. Indeed, I must see my boy.”

He looked hard and long at me, and then he said deliberately—

“I am not sure if we are exactly friends, Mrs. Calendar, you and I. One stretches a point sometimes—for a friend.”

Susan never pities herself, has never done so, I should say, for even one luxurious hour. The world has always seemed to her so full of things and people wanting all the pity she has to give. Somehow in these dread moments I thought of her.

“Tell me, Mr. Smart—for I don’t seem to remember or to know—has Albert Ross a mother and father living?”



## Broken Dreams

"No, he is an orphan. He lives with his grandmother, to whom, as a matter of fact, he has been no end of a nuisance. And now, Mrs. Calendar, as to my question—are we friends?"

"I have so few friends, Mr. Smart. I don't make new ones. Perhaps it is that I live so much for my boy. Will you take me to him now?"

He smiled and flicked an insect from his coat.

"My dear Mrs. Calendar, you must see——" he began.

But at that moment the lattice of an upper chamber was flung out, a boy settled himself for a spring, and before I could call out to stop you, you were on the ground, and a second later, sorely shaken, but unhurt and unafraid, in my arms.

## The House of

“How dare you!” blazed Mr. Smart in a storm of wrath, “how dare you!”

“I was not on parole, sir,” you answered, standing up straight and very white before him. “I saw my mother and I knew that if I could I must get to her. If you will let me have a few words alone with her, I will go back to the room and give you my word not to stir from it until allowed. But I want a few words with my mother first.”

Mr. Smart no longer blazed, instead he sneered.

“I should advise you, young Calendar, for your own welfare in this matter, to behave circumspectly to me. And as for this most interesting filial exhibition, I will ask your mother and yourself to both go inside and I will see what latitude can be allowed”

## Broken Dreams

We followed him into a deserted classroom and sat down together at one of the chipped and ink-stained desks. There was a knock at the outer door, and the sound of voices, and reluctantly he left us alone at last.

Oh, my dear, your face, so white and brave and full of woe, shall I remember it always? Did we speak a great deal? I think not. Those broken little whispers, so much to us, so senseless to all the world besides!

The gaily-coloured maps upon the walls, Europe, Asia, Africa, America, how wide the world, how narrow for you and me! The print of the Shepherd carrying a lamb in His arms across the dangers of the ford . . . Good Shepherd, carry, too, my child!

“Poor Ross! Poor little dog! . . .

## The House of

Will they let me come home to you, to-night? Oh, mother, mother, if they don't!"

And to see the iron entering for the first time into a young soul—it is easier to look on sudden death than that.

"Dear old Polar, mother! Whatever will she say? Don't let her hear it from any one but you. Don't stop here, darling, with these horrid men about. Hark, there's another! Is it the trooper, I wonder? He's a decent sort, anyhow. But I hate you being here, darling. Go home and let Polar take care of you till I can come . . . oh, mother, they won't . . . they can't! . . ."

And then they took you from me.

Before going back to Susan I sped across the fields to where the grandmother of Albert Ross lived. She met me

## Broken Dreams

with a hailstorm of abuse. Her violence was one of the terrible things whose memory one never loses. Her grief was drowned in rage. The dead boy lay hardly cold, but it was compensation, not sympathy, for which she clamoured.

“Ay, talk! What’s that? Talk won’t drive the plough for ’e. Talk won’t fetch the cow in and milk un for ’e, will it? You can talk with your lips but you’ll ’ave to pay with your ’ands—your ’ands full! D’ye ’ear? You and your fine gentleman son. Let ’im come ’long ’ere—I’ll ’ave the blood out of ’im!” And then she screamed at me again, and for a moment I thought she was going to strike me.

How wild a place the world seemed then! Was it the solitary pink hawthorn standing in glory like a vision of

## The House of

the dawn on the edge of the bush, was it the little crisp snow-strewn clouds tossed on the heavenly blue? I thought they mocked at me as I fled to Susan across the bitter summer fields.

And in Susan's agony I lost for a while my own. With such a love she loved you, Mine.

A sweet note sounded for a moment through the misery of the day. Miss Franks rushed in between two lessons to tell us that if a good word was wanted for Eric Calendar she was prepared to say he was the dearest lad, the bravest and the straightest that ever flew a kite, robbed an orchard, or adored his mother. And Susan and I no longer wondered why we had always loved the little shy, proud lady of the eyes that danced with fun, the mouth that drooped with pain.

## Broken Dreams

Late in that awful afternoon a knock sounded at the door, which Susan hurried to open. It was the schoolmaster, Mr. Smart, she came to tell me. I nodded that he might come in, for words seemed choked within me.

“Mrs. Calendar,” he said, looking slowly around him, and then at me, “what a very, what a particularly pleasant room! Yes,” he continued, “the window set high in the wall, and the wide sill inside—what lovely hyacinths—a particularly pleasant room!” He moved across the floor: “Ah, the big open fireplace, too! The comfort of it! I can picture it in the winter with the logs hissing and glowing and the firelight shining on the books—what a multitude! And you and your boy. Just you two, is it? Always alone. No

## The House of

room for a friend. It would be dull without the boy, though, Mrs. Calendar, eh ? ”

At that I lifted my eyes and measured him, and a dull rage burnt within me, and the unclean things that may lie in life's way were spread in all their cruelty and ugliness before me. And I hid my agony deep lest he should see it. “Mr. Smart,” I said, “I thought you were come to me with news of my child. If it is not so I will go at once myself to where he is. I must see him again before the evening. I must hear if there is anything on earth to be done to get him back to-night.”

“Well, yes, there is one thing, the thing I came to tell you of. But, O woman, jumping at her conclusions with no reason; unfair, impatient, lovely woman, the same



## Broken Dreams

everywhere and at all times. Try to possess your soul in patience, for it is a thing you cannot do yourself. I only, I alone, can do it."

"I am too perplexed, Mr. Smart. Suspense has made me all numb and dull. Explain it, will you?"

"Explain—what?"

"This thing which only you can do."

"Mrs. Calendar, it is this way. The justices of the peace, at the request of the constable whom you interviewed this morning, have decided to let your boy return to you to-night (on the understanding, of course, that he is to be present at the inquest to-morrow) subject to my giving them a report which shall seem sufficiently favourable to them, of your son's conduct and general character at school."

## The House of

“You have done it, Mr. Smart? He is even now on his way home?”

“I have not done it, Mrs. Calendar.”

“You have not? You won’t delay doing it a minute longer, will you? Did you want to see me first? Oh, don’t mind me. Is it a written report you are to send in? Look, here are pens and paper. Will you do it now, at once?”

“In the event of my report being unfavourable, your son will remain to-night in custody. And, though perhaps I need not say it, yet the finding of the coroner to-morrow will almost certainly be influenced by what I may or may<sup>a</sup> not have to say.”

There was silence between us for a full minute, while I thought my heart would burst its bounds for beating. And I wondered how I still could hide my terror and my grief.

## Broken Dreams

“Mr.—Mr.—Smart—you are—not—going to give an unfavourable account of Eric? You could not.”

He smiled horribly.

“Suppose I were to say that the colour of my report depended on Eric’s mother. What then, eh?”

“On me! But how? Oh, Mr. Smart, have pity! Tell me what you mean. Tell me all you mean. And tell me quickly.”

“Quickly, is it? Well, I do not see that I am called upon to unduly exert myself for a boy whose mother has flouted me consistently for some time past, who has ignored my friendly advances, my wishes for an acquaintance that should ripen into friendship—possibly into something deeper. Ah! I beg of you. You look so white and shocked. Surely——”

## The House of

“Mr. Smart, I pray that I do not know what you mean. . . . There is a little boy in the township three miles away. Is it a prison or a police cell he is in? I can think of nothing, see nothing but his face as it was when he left me this morning. Is it a word from you that can let him out? Mr. Smart, I am not a widow. Eric’s father is not dead. Am I to take it that you can but will not help me in this extremity, or that you can and will?”

“Dear me, dear me! You are not a widow! Well, well! Are you . . . but we will leave it at that. Don’t go away. Mrs. Calendar, if you are willing to receive me as a friend into your little home circle, whenever I choose to call, then, in less than two hours, your boy shall be in your arms again. These young people never

## Broken Dreams

know their luck. But I must have a distinct understanding on the subject. One's word of honour is a vague sort of thing. I will write out two papers—one for you to sign, the other to hand in to the justice of the peace. It is such a little thing I ask of you: in common charity you should grant it me: and in return I give you—ah! only you yourself can know the worth of what I give you in return. Is it not so? Yes. Are the pens and papers here? We need delay no longer now.”

He sat at the writing-table and began writing quickly without pause or pity. Suddenly he swerved round on his chair to me.

“Mrs. Calendar, you will not be leaving the neighbourhood by any chance in the near future?” he inquired.

## The House of

Such an idea had not come to me, whose tortured brain moved slowly, or could hold but one thought or wish, but as he spoke a vision of fair days and freedom far away swam before my eyes.

“Because, on reflection, before writing the other paper on behalf of your son I must first have your promise, signed, that you will stay on here for a year at least, or no, let us say a couple of years. By that time I shall hope to be quit of the place myself. Oh, it means nothing, Mrs. Calendar—just a little whim of mine. If you very much desire to leave before the term expires, I have no doubt we can arrange it in perfect amity together? Will you put your name here? You hesitate? And the captive in the valley languishing in captivity: the sensitive child-heart beating under the

## Broken Dreams

shadow of the prison walls. Ah ! no, I thought not. Thank you. Hurrah ! You may rely on me to see the matter through for you." Here he waved his arms dramatically and laughed aloud. In another moment he was gone.

At his going Susan ran in. I told her a little, a very little, of what had passed, for I was sick with the ignominy of it all. But Susan hears more than is merely spoken.

"My lamb ! my lamb !" she said, folding me to the bruised heart which was never yet too tired to heed another's woe. And she comforted me as I would comfort you, my own.

With strained ears and eyes we sat waiting through the gloom, hardly daring to speak aloud lest we might miss the first sound of your coming feet.

## The House of

Once she whispered, "Storm to-day but peace to-morrow, dearie, a long peace and a fine."

And I whispered back : " Susan, do you call to mind those evenings when Eric would be asleep in the corner of my room, you would be knitting and dreaming in the kitchen, and I would be sitting idly in the big chair beyond the porch ? "

" Yes, and when I brought your milk up you would say, ' Susan, just sniff, everything *is* so sweet. ' "

" Yes, all the bush scents rising as the dew fell."

" And the stars getting brighter every minute."

" And the moonlight, perhaps ! "

" Yes, ma'am, like as if it was washing the dear world, washing all the weariness and stains away."



## Broken Dreams

“Ah, yes, Susan. And singing the slumber-song which only it can sing.”

“Singing it to the living in their homes and the dead in their graves.”

“Hark, Susan! was that anything? . . .

It was only good to be alone because you and Eric were so close. But such a peace was there, a peace that you could touch and hold and nestle up against. If some day I could touch the hem of such a peace again! Say that some day you think we shall, just that I may hear you say it.”

“Dearie, of course, of course we shall. Such little, little things they are, the years that seem so long.”

About eight o'clock of the evening rain fell. The splash of heavy drops upon the leaves called us both outside: at first it was like the sound of some one running.

## The House of

"Susan, if he comes through the bush ! It is so dark and he has to pass that old woman's cottage. But it is quicker far than the road."

"Then he'll come that way, bless him !"

"If I could be sure ! But there are two paths even through the bush."

"My dearie, your place is to sit still on that hard stool called Patience. He might come by the road in some one's trap. And whenever he comes his mother must be here for him, ay, and his old Polar too !"

The rain fell more heavily—the steady, soaking rain we loved to listen to together, you and I : the night grew black as pitch, and I envied the skies that they could weep so well, and the night that told its heaviness aloud.

"Come in, my dearie. I will build a fire in the living-room. How he will love

## Broken Dreams

it, my bonnie boy! And you, you look him out some dry, soft clothes and we will get them warm. And we'll get some chocolate ready and hot toast. Oh, but there's just a power of things to be done!"

Wasn't she beautiful, dear, our Susan? I can hear her now, calling back to me from the porch, "And there's his silkworms, they haven't had fresh leaves since the morning; why, he'll just be scolding the life out of me when he does come!"

At last, all breathless, wet, and roadworn, you came, and it was as though I held you in my arms from the dead.

I seem to remember Susan hovering round to fulfil her lowly offices of love, and being much disturbed when you told her you could neither sleep nor go to bed. In the end she left us before the bright

## The House of

purring fire she had built. She put out all the lights but one and we sat there together in the gentle glow, you curled up on the lounge with your head in my lap. If I could smooth the trouble from that small, damp, aching head that carried heavily for the first time the burden of its thirteen years ! But even a child must dree his weird. And we could not find at first the courage to speak of what the morrow might still bring forth.

Long after, when the short summer night was far spent, you slept at last with your hand in mine. Little dear hand, held so still and closely through the dark hours, a day must come, an appointed day, when our hands can never touch each other's any more. Before the blackness of that time if each have only love to remember of the other it will be well indeed : in the

## Broken Dreams

desolation of that day what solace for the one who is left behind to know that the other never found love wanting or knocked at the door in vain.

Daybreak crept slowly in, and it suddenly grew very cold. I dared not stir lest I should wake you. But soon, as an angel of the dawn, came Susan, and after a dumb greeting, I signalled to her to bring a covering for you. Then without a sound her nimble fingers were busy at the fire, and soon she had hot tea ready and was lifting it to my lips herself, and a sweet sense of peace and healing trembled through the room. She brought her Bible and sat down on a low chair by the fire, anxiously watching where every now and then you moaned and shivered in your sleep. She did not read, but big tears rolled presently down her cheeks. Then she

## The House of

hid her face in her hands, and I am sure she prayed—those little formless, wordless prayers perhaps, that still go up in countless hosts on the wings of faith to the highest heaven, and are as real as love, or hope, or misery itself. I noticed that the blue marker you worked for her as a little child was in its place at the Sermon on the Mount, and soon she raised her bent head and opened the Book at the loved spot where she always reads as though for the first time—

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

“My lamb ! my lamb !” she murmured once when you turned restlessly, and they were the only words she spoke.

Promise of a fair and friendly morning shone through the hill-top mists and

## Broken Dreams

began to dance its way shyly into the room, and the shrill singing of the birds made me fear for that fitful sleep of yours. A lark rose up and made wild, sweet music overhead. Ah ! but I would have had him mute as Susan and myself.

When you woke, you started from my arms without seeing me, and stretched towards Susan, who was on the low chair near you.

“Polar,” you said drowsily, “what is it ? Is it to-day or yesterday ? ”

She folded you to her with a divine tenderness as though she would soothe every hurt and terror, and then she said—

“Why, it’s a soldier’s day, that’s what it is ! And if your soul is sorrowful, my lamb, sorrowful even unto death, still you must stand up and face it as a soldier does, and endure hardness, just as you would a

## The House of

broken limb, or a burnt hand, or what not else besides."

"Oh, Polar, I remember! Where's mother?"

An hour or two later we all three drove to the courthouse in the valley. It was a noble way arched over with eucalyptus and blackwood trees, while giant tree-ferns shot up straight and tall as palms from the gullies, till one felt bathed, as it were, in a green shower of tenderness. Parrots of gleaming tints flashed and screamed about us, the dew still sparkled on the old brown road, and the wild, fresh scent of the undergrowth rose up like incense on the crystal air. We breathed deeply, and some of the sweet riot of it all must have stirred our souls to a good courage, for fears and misgivings, like childish things,



## Broken Dreams

were put away. Till once, near the end of the road, rounding a turn, we caught a glimpse of the courthouse below and the crowd already gathered outside. You grew very white under your schoolboy's tan, and for a moment I thought you would flinch from the ordeal. But Susan knew better. Looking around her slowly and then at you, she whispered—

“Just as fine and fair and clear as the morning, so will my boy be to-day! Something inside that never tells me wrong tells me that.”

“Polar, I'm in a mortal funk. But no one else is going to know it. Take care of mother, all the time. You shall have the silk dress and the lace collar some day, Polar, just the same.”

The fairy gifts, the dreams of Susan's innocent heart, but which were to be hers

## The House of

to have and hold on one understanding, from one soul, at one cost only—even should she wait a score of years for them : the secret between herself and you of which I only knew the outer fringe and which was never referred to except in the supremest or the most unguarded moment.

Will you remember always the courthouse room on that August morning, Mine? How they took you from us to stand by the table on which the dead boy lay? How the little wind rustled in and caught the edges of the cover which was laid over him, and how the trooper secured the corners with stones at last? How Dick Cleeve and another boy gave evidence as eye-witnesses of what had passed? The ring of Dick's voice when the coroner asked him if you and Albert Ross were bad friends before the fatal

## Broken Dreams

morning, and he answered, "Eric Calendar has no time for a bully, sir, but once when Ross caught his foot in a rabbit trap young Calendar spent three-quarters of an hour trying to get it out for him," and the kindly coroner nodding, "That will do. You may step down now, Cleeve."

Most of all I shall remember the look on your face when the schoolmaster came forward and gave evidence—in your favour certainly, but given with a reserve, a peculiar hesitation, an air which said that he knew so much more than he chose to speak, a subtle implication, incomprehensible and amazing, that he was keeping back part of the truth, and that, for your sake entirely—or for mine.

Under the sting of it your face flushed and your eyes were set upon him with a

## The House of

strange stare. To outsiders I do not know how much was apparent, but to us, unduly sensitive and highly strung, perhaps, as we were, it was as though he held the balance of the scales of life and death in his hands, and that though he intended for his own purpose that life should be yours, yet he wanted to impress on us how easily, through his agency, death or its equivalent might be yours instead.

And you stared at him, puzzled, vaguely annoyed, not understanding, as though he spoke in a tongue that was only half familiar—

“Is this boy of a pugnacious disposition as a rule?”

The schoolmaster did not answer at once. He assumed an air of deep thought, which resolved itself into a pained expression—

## Broken Dreams

“Well, no, I should not say he was of a pugnacious disposition,” he answered slowly, emphasising the adjective, and giving a curious sort of impression that if you weren’t just that, you were something else as bad or worse.

And thus he continued his evidence.

But on the rough hour and our strained souls, like dew on desert sands, fell presently the voice of the coroner—

“There is no case whatever to go before a jury. This regrettable occurrence was purely an accident. And let the awfulness of it be a warning to Eric Calendar not to use his fists on mere impulse so freely again. Calendar, you may rejoin your mother.”

An attempt to applaud this decision was instantly hushed.

\* \* \* \* \*

## The House of

Late in the dark evening, when we reached home, Susan insisted on our both going at once to bed. You came to me from your little room that opened out of mine, and your dear sleepy eyes were full of trouble.

“Mother, was it an accident? For I meant to go for him all I knew. When I saw him put the match to that poor little beggar’s nose, I felt a rage inside me, the sort of rage that does make you kill. Am I really what they call a ——?”

“Dear, listen! You meant to hurt him as he was hurting that little dog. You did not mean that he should never see the fields or skies again, nor play with his playmates any more. No thought of killing was for a moment in your mind. Perhaps you should only have thought of saving the dog without harming its

## Broken Dreams

torturer. I cannot say—it is too hard for me. I dare not praise you ; but remember, dearest, that I have not blamed you, not once for a tiny second. And now you must be brave with yourself, not for my sake, not for Polar's, but for your own. You must not whine over yourself, or exaggerate what you did in your own eyes. You *know* you had no thought to kill. You know that in that one wild moment your only thought was to fight for something that was helpless against its agony. You must not let your heart be troubled for the deed, but for the pitiful ending that it had. All your life long that will be a trouble to you, Mine, but because of it you need look no one in the face less fairly than before. Do you quite see, now ? ”

And as we whispered thus together,

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locked as lovers in each other's arms, bold steps came up the little sanded path, and a sharp knock sounded on the door. Ah, those steps—that knock! I have heard them since continually, and never once without feeling that a nail was being driven into my living flesh.

We stared breathlessly at one another as we heard Susan saying, in a voice not quite her own—

“No, I cannot let you in. The mistress and Master Eric have gone to bed. I will therefore wish you good-night, sir.”

“Wait a minute. Let me see, it is Sunday to-morrow. Tell Mrs. Calendar I will be round after Evensong.”

Without answering, Susan quietly shut the door. Very slowly she came to our



## Broken Dreams

room, she whose feet sped so swiftly when they brought the tidings of peace or gladness.

“That man ! And he says he’s coming to-morrow evening again.”

I looked at her and then at you and saw that in both your minds calamity could clearly go no farther, and then remembered that it was I who had done this thing.

“Listen Susan, and you, Eric, too. This man must be allowed to come in, within reason, when he calls. Had I not promised that, you would have spent last night, Eric, in the watchhouse in the valley, and to-day he would quite recklessly have manufactured dishonest evidence against you. It was the only way, my darling, the only way as I thought for you and for me. Directly

## The House of

I saw that the coroner was that kindly old doctor who had healed me of my burns, and that Miss Franks was waiting there to proclaim your praises to all who cared to hear, I could have cried aloud thinking that after all we might have managed without his—help. But there was always the awful chance that if he had distorted things or tried to damage you, it might have had a result we cannot even think of. And what was I that I did not dare to run this risk? A coward, an idiot beyond words! . . . Oh, you dears, but I was! And the penalty is now and here to pay, and only you and Susan can help me to pay it at all—only you and Susan.”

And I looked from one to the other of you, knowing well that your

## Broken Dreams

love would not snap at the strain, yet dreading with a nameless dread what I might see pictured on your faces. But Susan, who if she cannot bear another's burden will not add to it by a feather-weight, murmured: "*We'll* see to it for you, darling, never fear, and now go to bed, sleep sweetly and sleep long, even till the morning." While you, what was it that you said, while fun rode high over grief for a moment in your eyes: "I dare not praise you; but remember, dearest, that I shall not once for a tiny second blame you!"

And we slept for fourteen hours.

IT must be nearly three years now since that long sleep of ours. Sometimes in dreaming moments I have thought of it as a parting of the ways, that tiny span of deep forgetfulness, severing the tender ache of the life that went before from the dull fret and misery of the life that followed after it.

For we paid the penalty required of us, paid it to the uttermost farthing.

I say "we," since on that dolorous way not one smart was mine alone to suffer, but the common lot of us all. Oh, dear souls, generous and patient beyond words to say, but for you both how insecure and frail might the end

## House of Broken Dreams

have been. But with you, the untried and the tried, always loyally at my side, the ugliness of the way took on a higher quality of expiation: through you some ineffable influence would breathe out on the weary hour and lift it from meanness into finer places of discipline and mercy and control.

So few souls ever penetrated beneath the veil of our life together, yours and mine and Susan's. Its very reserve and loneliness were to us its sweetness: but the faults that might be born of qualities such as these often shone out and faced me gravely on the day's horizon. Because our lives were sequestered I knew well no gloom must touch them. Solitude need never mean desolation, nor seclusion selfishness. Reserve need not spell morbidity, nor

## The House of

a life apart be a life aloof. For us, it was the more needful to steep our lives in sunshine of the spirit in proportion as worldly gaieties refrained from us, for where sunshine is there can no stagnation be. And this I knew was the insidious foe to whom no quarter must be shown.

Enter, then, into this cloistered life of ours, which worshipped at the altar of peace instead of that of popularity, a cruel crawling thing which reared its head and struck at our joy, sapped our strength, poisoned the sweet waters of silence and all delight for us, and drenched in misery scores of gentle hours which may never be again. And now and again in mutiny of heart at this ordering of things I used to think that if redemption lay alone that

## Broken Dreams

way, then might we go unredeemed for ever.

In the morning we would wake to health and laughter and the crystal beauty of the mountainside, and suddenly the thought of what might come with evening would hush our gladness and strike us dumb. We, who had loved it more than well, grew to dread the twilight time that brings dreams and peace and rest to dusty pilgrim feet and the songs of dear unspoken words. We sat no longer on the verandah by the porch to watch the passing of the afterglow, because we feared to see this thing coming to us like a calamity through the dusk. We felt better able to meet that mocking smile in the shadows of the room than underneath the vastness of the sky. In the room

## The House of

one could shelter now and then behind a lamp, a book, a piece of work : by dint of managing one could evade in little nameless ways the derision with which the very air was charged. No dulness or lack of response on our part for a moment troubled him. I would often wonder from my heart how a man could willingly choose to spend such futile hours, evening after evening, how he could deliberately assume the *rôle* of the unwanted, unwelcomed guest, of what fibrous tissue such a man could be, what generalship, what true vocation in the world he must have missed, clad, as he was, in relentlessness as in a garment, regardless utterly of the distaste or pain of those against whom his plans were laid.

Often I let my mind go far afield



## Broken Dreams

in speculations such as these, finding in them relief against the terror of the thought that he was there in the room to see us, to see me, to vex our helpless souls as nothing in the world besides could vex them.

About this time some of the boyishness left your face, and a grave look grew there in its stead, a touch of haughtiness, sometimes almost of disdain, and I seem to see that your life long that little mark will unconsciously be there. It was not there when your face was turned to Susan or myself or to the face of a friend: but in silence or before strangers, before the world at large, it was unmistakably and continually there, the impress of the environment breathing from those hostile hours.

And I, dear, no prayers of mine, no

## The House of

kisses, nor all my tears can move that mark away. It is no more the little grief of childhood that a word can heal. Time, the master artist, and Sorrow, his servant, carved it there, and the work of these defies the touch of mortal hand. But, oh, for the little face as the sun first shone upon it!

After a while I arranged that you should no longer do your evening work in the room with us, but in a small room adjoining, and that Susan and I together, with what grace and patience we could, should receive the school-master.

Mr. Smart's annoyance at Susan being always with us was expressed in various ways continually. But on this point I was adamant; and Susan, undaunted by

## Broken Dreams

words, looks, or manner, did not once leave me during these hours. What they meant for her of indescribable weariness I can never know. What to me they would have been without her I can only dimly think. Sometimes this strange man, concerning whose mental balance I wondered constantly, would enter the cottage and sit for two hours saying scarcely as many words. This only happened rarely, and was to punish us unduly for we knew not what, but the memory of the almost unbearable tension is white-hot still. Sometimes I escaped into your room for a few moments on the pretext of helping you with your work. How we rushed at each other then! What smiles, what whispers, what warnings with fingers on our lips! It was "Hush! hush!" for all

## The House of

the world like two children snatching a stolen interview from an austere power, and enjoying every second of it with a fearful joy. It was the little light of laughter that lies hidden in the black heart of tragedy—or was it perhaps the bitter drop distilled from comedy whose tears are never far below? Who knows and who shall care? It was our moment, ours, bought at a price, and of worth accordingly. But if we tarried overlong at such a time together, a heavy tramp began up and down the floor of the room beyond, which was my cue to go back without more ado. For once when I overstayed the limit, this strange despot walked to the door of the living room and called out—

“Mrs. Calendar, play the game, I say ; I came to see you, not Mrs. Susan,

## Broken Dreams

and here you have left me alone with Mrs. Susan for nearly ten minutes!"

It was so extraordinary, so ridiculous, that a nervous flippancy took hold of me as I left you and your books behind me—

"Mr. Smart! But you make me think of Bernard Shaw when he said, 'Dear me! how men do exaggerate the difference between one woman and another.'"

"Shaw!" he muttered, "Shaw? The first time you have mentioned a friend's name to me. Let us have more of him. Where does he live? What does he do?"

"Did I claim him for a friend, Mr. Smart? . . . Can it be? . . . Ah, well, he lives away on a little island and has a rough time of it very often."

## The House of

“A little island! What the devil is he—a lighthouse keeper?”

“Mr. Smart! But you have said it truly; a lighthouse keeper. How could you guess all at once like that? He keeps such a wonderful beacon flaring, I forget the candle-power—something enormous. But they say it varies.”

“Varies! What stuff women will swallow, to be sure! They should never talk on technical things at all. What’s the name of the island? Where is it?”

“Mr. Smart, that would be telling—everything! But the rocks, the danger rocks over which the beacon flares, are called the Cant Rocks. Don’t they mention them in the school geographies?”

“The Cant Rocks! That I’ll swear they don’t, nor in any atlas either, unless I’m much mistaken. And I’ll match

## Broken Dreams

my coast-line knowledge against any man's."

"Ah, Mr. Smart, maps are not what they used to be, it seems to me," I said lamely, looking wearily at the old clock in the corner.

If he had had the least saving grace of culture, spirit, *savoir-vivre*, world-knowledge, I think I could have dealt more gently in my mind with his colossal affronts. But the perfect example of everything a man should not be was to be found in this village schoolmaster. Bigoted, selfish, cruel, possessed of an unconquerable will, yet training it apparently merely to ignoble ends, I used often to try and find out where would be in him the divine spark which is somewhere still aglow in the murkiest human

## The House of

soul. Had he an old mother somewhere, a father who turned to him for sympathy or succour? No. It appeared he was an only child, and that his parents had died in his youth. He had no hobby. He did not even smoke. Nature awoke no answering chord of joy. He loved the life of cities, and cursed the necessity that drove him to the wilderness. Mathematics, geometry, and the exact sciences were the things in which he excelled, and was indeed a brilliant student and teacher.

Added to this was his pride in Australia. The light of the world, the salt of the earth, the country to be desired, beloved of all was Australia. Other lands and nations existed only as the butt against which the true Australian sends out his shafts of sarcasm, the objects of



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which he sharpens his intelligence, the audience, inglorious if immense, on whose account he is able to present himself with compliments continually, thanking God that neither he, his wares, his climate, his history, his horizon, are as they or theirs.

When he referred to his coast-line knowledge, I knew that it was the Australian coast-line only that was in his mind. Once when I ventured to suggest that but for the mighty name of the Motherland of whom he thought and spoke such little things, he would not be able to walk in any sort of peace or freedom in his own land, he retorted—

“Rubbish, my dear lady ; insular rubbish, all on a par with the jingle about the ships, the men, and the money too. Why, when it came to the point of points, it was Australia that set out to

## The House of

help your mighty Motherland in her hour of need and danger, when she couldn't hold her own against a few ragged Boers. Yes. Australia that helped you, not you Australia. Always remember that!"

This was the insufferable stuff we were often forced to listen to for an hour at a time. This was the man to whom was entrusted the care of the minds of little children, that he should fill them with fine ideals of patriotism, service, reverence, with spirited traditions and splendid loyalty—the things not written down on the school programme, but which the born teacher knows to be of even more account than they.

But against all this the discipline for us of his presence was perhaps invaluable. Though our blood boiled we never quarrelled. If we flinched he did not see

## Broken Dreams

it. We went through intolerable hours holding on to our composure as to a jewel which no one in the world might snatch away.

Just before the account between us was settled, in the very last week of our life in the hillside cottage, he came upon me alone one noontide hour where I sat reading under the mimosa-trees by the creek.

“Don’t look so ridiculously startled. I’m not a beast of prey,” he said angrily. “I think as a—well, yes, as a friend of such long standing, I am entitled, before we part for a little while, to a few more particulars of your private life. You once began a confidence, confession—what the deuce was it? You must know that I have certain intentions with regard to yourself . . . ah, my dear lady, did you

## The House of

think you had done with me? Understand that you will never have done with me, never. Did you really think that because the terms of that paltry little bargain were fulfilled, that you were going to wipe me out of your life as a boy wipes a sum from his slate? Really, for a woman not a fool, you are uncommonly foolish. Understand for all time, that, visible or invisible, I am there, in the heart of your life. I have perhaps only had one very strong wish in my own, and according as to how you help me to realise it, so shall peace or misery be yours. Now, what have you to say? Is it to be peace, peace with honour, peace without—but anyhow, at any rate, peace at last?”

He came towards me, a sort of madness gleaming in his eyes. I was faint

## Broken Dreams

with terror. The trees swam round, the sparkle of the stream made me sick to see.

Suddenly a blackbird began to sing in the coppice. It was like no birdsong I have heard before or since.

“World without end,  
World without end,  
Fear nothing ever,  
Fear nothing ever,”

it seemed to sing. And with the music I knew that danger there was none, and that such as it was I had come once more into my own. I think I said “Hush!” that we might listen to the falling of those liquid pearls on the drowsy hour. And strangely enough, he was quiet, listening, and the wildness went out of his look, and as I slowly moved to go he walked off in the other direction, muttering something as he went.

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Oh, little bird, does no intelligence direct your heavenly outpouring? Is neither soul nor mind behind? Is it the instinct without the insight of the artist, nothing but the careless rapture of the beating life within, nothing but the passion of the shining hour?

Even so, little bird, you fought my fight and won it, and there is nothing I can do for you.

But now those days are done. And at this distance of time and space, such a little distance yet of either, we cannot realise that we are free. We walk delicately, so to speak, through the soft places and the zephyr airs of our freedom. We whisper to Joy that her footsteps must go, oh! so lightly, so tenderly and carefully, lest indeed she

## Broken Dreams

wake up Pain again from where he slumbers for a little while.

Dear Joy, take care, take care !

Sometimes in the gentle moods which come with the snapping of a strain, I take myself to task and wonder if less dignity and more sympathy on our part towards the offender would have answered better—if it were possible to have pointed out a finer way to an understanding so ignoble. It is idle wondering, for they are done, those strange and sombre days, and the new life shines to the far horizon with love and hope and work most wonderful.

But, little Joy, go lightly. Oh, take care !

TO-DAY the city hems us in. Glamour, hurry, noise, a heavy air or airlessness are now our portion. Unconscious, careless glances are all we get to-day. In the country never so rare a passer-by whose look is not intimate, interested, even if hostility lies below. Here a thousand eyes brush you idly with their unseeing glance. A bird, a butterfly, a bee, would be of infinitely more account than you. And with what delight we adjust ourselves to this new proportion, and think what great, good fun it is to be one of a city crowd, to come and go unknown, unremembered, and unseen!

Ah, the kindly city, we think, Susan



## House of Broken Dreams

and I, where no one tears your life out of your heart till you can see its very shadows reflected on the faces of those who come towards you!

The cathedral—from whence the music of consolation rolls out into the meanness and the squalor of the streets—the cathedral inside whose great doors you may find a place and bow your head in misery, in adoration, in protest, or in pleading, and no one knows, or cares, or wonders whether you are there, or why; to gain or give, to love or lose, to remember or forget.

The dear glory of it, we say, Susan and I.

But Susan is jealous too sometimes for the pleasant country, the country where her dear ones lie who now are dead. When days are lifeless with the

## The House of

heat, and the night a heaviness hard to bear, she murmurs—

“Ay, up there along the ridge, by the cornfields in the moonlight, my, but the air will be good to-night!” And we sniff it together, that far-off fragrant air, with the chill dash in it that heartens and inspires.

Or it may be that we are idly stirring ice into our drinking water to make it speak of crystal springs upon the hills and she will say—

“Bless me! City life! What a make-believe it is. . . .” But before she can finish two boyish arms are flung round her and a glad voice says—

“Buck up, Polar! What’s the good of having a grand name if you don’t live up to it? Book here for the North Pole. No reduction on a return. Oh,

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Dick, she's pricked me with her magnetic needle. And that is how women play the game."

For Dick is staying with us, Dick Cleeve of the honest eyes and bonnie ways innumerable. And the wisdom of two boys is continually being pitted against the maturer soberness of Susan and myself, who know—and think ourselves quite smart for knowing—that it is youth that keeps age young, and youth perhaps alone.

Eric is to take up the study of meteorology in all its branches, with a view to adopting it as a profession later on. He is taking a special course at the University, and promising things are whispered to me of his genius in the line he has chosen so early, and without change or faltering, to make his own.

## The House of

In the skilful use of instruments he has not been, for his age, surpassed ; and his eager interest in the least astronomical search or study has already been noted down.

Professor Langrishe, the chief, is making an improved, specially fitted kite, to fly from high altitudes in order to take cloud temperatures, and in his efforts he tells me that he has more than once been helped by suggestions from Eric, whose whole heart is with the master in his work.

Eric's Mecca now is the Lick Observatory. To worship some day at that distant Californian shrine, to watch with those who watch in that lofty, lonely Temple of Science, where the "mighty glass keeps its great, steady eye for ever fixed on heaven for earth's sake"

## Broken Dreams

—this is the longing of his young life.

Soon after Albert Ross was killed I let the grandmother understand that I would pay her a sum of a hundred pounds yearly for five years. I heard that the grandmother bears her loss with quite exemplary cheerfulness, although I feel it is ignoble of me to set this down. Especially as the old lady rages no more, but sends me a pair of chickens twice a year by way of receipt, when we sit down to a curious meal, where we feel that because hilarity is out of place, we are secretly consumed with a wild desire for inconsequent mirth.

I mention the fact of this money being paid merely to add what a strain it is upon our little income, and how it means that we must live with thrift

## The House of

by our side ; that we may not travel, and that we must shut our eyes to many sweetnesses for yet awhile.

Although all the money in the world cannot atone for a life, yet in this case I have wondered if I acted perhaps too impulsively. At the time I thought the denial necessary on our part to enable me to keep the promise would be an excellent discipline ; and I also wanted no shadow of misgiving to grow up with Eric that he had destroyed an old woman's prop and mainstay without redress. But it means that boyish plans and boyish dreams must be sternly laid aside till the time is meet again for their consideration.

None the less are they dear little days, the days of these five lean years, when there is no money for travel. So

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we see to it that inside the home all is gay and fair and lovely; and sometimes I ask myself, or Susan, Are we really poor, or are we only playing at being so? And Susan says, emphatically, the latter, and we are grave again, for real poverty is a thing of so much anguish that we may not speak lightly of it. It is perhaps on the same plane of tragedy as desertion, death, dishonour, and things whose memory one keeps folded in one's heart for ever, hardly daring to speak of them or drag them into the light of day, lest their terrible bitterness rise up and slay the very heart in whose silent keeping they lost their sting.

"Susan, tell me truly, indeed," I said to her, towards the end of a busy day, as we stood together on an upstairs

## The House of

balcony, waiting for Eric to come home, "but you would never call our life monotonous, would you?"

"Ah, my lamb!" she said, and there are times when Susan calls me a lamb, that I feel so tall and proud and anything but lamblike: "life is never monotonous to hearts that ache."

On the face of this, does it seem strange if little Joy, dancing up and down the house with her fairy footsteps, and going never so delicately too, managed none the less to arouse the wrath of Pain, where he lay crouching restlessly without the gate? But this time it was not in his mind to maim or shatter with his blow; pin-pricks, little stabs of irritation, the canker that robs the day of its bloom, were all he thought to take from his sorry quiver.



## Broken Dreams

"That minx, Joy, she goes too easily. I will affright her that she walk more warily," one could almost hear him saying.

A week ago, at lunch-time, Eric ran home full of a happy excitement, and before I could ask him anything the words came tumbling from him—

"Mother, isn't it ripping? Langrishe has invited me to his little seaside show for Easter. We're to camp out in tents as the cottage isn't big enough for everybody. And it's deep-sea fishing all the time. And we're going to take observations at noon. And he's coming here to ask you if I may go. Be sure you wear the white dress, darling, and that necklace with the blue stones. He's dying to see Polar too, he says."

## The House of

The professor came, and with him a beautiful presence and atmosphere were in the room, and I recognised at once that here was indeed a man whom a boy might take for leader, master, friend, and be prouder of it than of most achievements.

He was very quiet. Dignity and kindness joined forces in him. There was a fine air of race about him too, the indefinable air of one who belongs by right of birth, tradition, training, to the ruling classes, the subtle, inalienable air which education, legislation, and all the arts of the world can neither give nor take away. His smile was, perhaps, more humorous than his actual speech, and many of his remarks were turned with a quite old-fashioned grace and chivalry.

“ I came, I believe, to congratulate you

## Broken Dreams

on your son, Mrs. Calendar," he said before he went away, "and to ask you if I might steal him for a day or two. But I leave congratulating your son on his mother, and wishing I could steal them both. The mothers of the famous men to be, they are not met with every day, you know."

He had a boundless belief in Eric and in Eric's future, almost as boundless as my own; he had as well a way of inspiring one with the most cheerful and courageous confidence in one's self. Indeed, for some time after he left, I was sunning myself under the impression that I was an important and fairly charming person; while as for Susan, whose fairy cake he tasted and praised in two or three magnetic words, she was mightily uplifted too.

## The House of

At the first blush it seemed to me as if this man belonged in reality to a rarer, a more courtly world than the one in which he actually moved. But I was glad, proudly and profoundly, that at the shrine of Science he had laid the firstfruits and the service of his life. For, after all, the life serene, the unruffled life, is there.

Rightly or wrongly, Susan and I flattered ourselves that we knew almost at once of what human texture and material men were made. We thought to detect with any connoisseur of human kind, a coarse from a fine material, a loose weaving from a close, the stuff that soon wears thin from the stuff that is good to the last.

“And if the dear Lord pleases, we never want to come nigh a piece of

## Broken Dreams

shoddy again," said Susan to me as we talked on such matters one evening in the gloaming. We were quite gay, for the morrow that was to bring back Eric was close at hand, and his daily letters had been songs of joy hidden under the schoolboy's terse, expressive slang.

Suddenly something stirred in the passage, and before we had time to muster our wits, Mr. Smart, the country schoolmaster, stood in the doorway. We gasped and stared at him without a word.

"Always still the same faithful two!" he protested. "Pardon my unceremonious entry. The door was open and I couldn't see a knocker. But such an old friend, what does he want with knockers, do I hear you say? Ah, well, you know, between even the best of friends there is an etiquette to be preserved."

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We stared at him, speechless, frozen, desperate. I was sure that he was mad. I tried to say the word beneath my breath to Susan, but she was too far off to hear.

“What!” he declared. “Did I take you by surprise? Not altogether! You surely knew that sooner or later, some day, I should come?”

At that Susan was stung to speech.

“Sir,” she said, rising to confront him with a gorgeous dignity, “you have made a bad mistake. The mistress receives no visitors. Had you rung the bell I should not have admitted you. I must therefore ask you at once to take your leave.”

“Calm yourself, Mrs. Duenna,” he said, waving her off as if she were a fly. “I only take it from your mistress herself that she receives no visitors. I am here

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to-night to listen to her voice again, not, if you will pardon me, to yours."

His mocking voice sent anger and loathing surging through me. In the midst of it all I remembered that there are people in the world who boast that they find humour in everything. Do they see the humour of it when their child lies dead before their eyes, I wondered dully, stupidly, helplessly, without cause or reason.

"Yes. You have made a bad mistake. Will you be so good as to leave the house at once?" I said, echoing Susan with a wildly beating heart.

"Now why? Just why?" he jeered.

"Because, as you have heard, I receive no visitors. But I am not aware that I should give you any reason for my wishes. You were at no time a friend of mine, nor ever could be."

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“Have you so soon forgotten, madam, your hour of fear and agony when your son was being detained, and my word alone was wanting to send him speeding back to you? Have you so soon forgotten!”

“Mr. Smart, I forget nothing. Has it ever struck you that you traded perhaps on that fear and agony? Anyhow, a bargain was struck between us. The terms of it were kept faithfully to the last letter. Is there really another thing to say?”

“You kept the letter, yes, but not the spirit of your promise. And I maintain that that part of the bargain is yet to be fulfilled by you, also that it wants a lifetime of friendly expression on your part before we are really quits.”

To such an amazing assertion there was no answer in the world. The only thing



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to do was to try and shift this abnormal creature from the terrible *j'y suis, j'y reste* kind of attitude he had assumed.

"Mr. Smart, you will kindly go at once. You must excuse me, but I will leave the room. Susan will show you out."

As I moved towards the door he darted forward and barred my outgoing.

"Listen, my dear fine lady! You receive no visitors, is it? How about the man who called the other evening and stayed for nearly two hours? Did you leave the room for him so abruptly? Was the position of the door pointed out to him on his arrival? If so, his protest was a lengthy one—what?"

This he actually said, and with such an air of malice, triumph, and coarseness, that one's very soul shivered before him. Only a man could cope with one like this,

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and we were two women, forlorn and lone.

It must have been nearly an hour that he stayed on, asking questions, referring to other days, covering us with insults that were the more insulting for the thin veil in which he thought well to wrap them. At last, tired out perhaps before our silent scorn, he went.

“Till we meet again!” he cried, saluting us profoundly—“it may be soon, it may be beggarly long. But always till we meet again. In the meantime, be assured of my deep and constant interest.”

Susan barred and locked the door, and we heard his defiant laugh outside as he stood for a moment in the porch. She saw to it that all the windows on the ground floor were secured, and then stood

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by the kitchen table looking at me with a great trouble in her eyes.

"The dirty bit of shoddy!" I heard her muttering, she whose lips opened only on such gentle words.

"Is he mad, I wonder, Susan?" I asked her; "he must be mad."

"Surely an evil spirit dwells with him," she said; "and we, who were all so happy in our nest—and the likes of him to come creeping along like a snake in the grass, and up and hissing at us."

"Susan, Eric must not know."

"I think, my lamb, he must."

"Oh, Susan, no! He might do something in his rage that would bring publicity upon us."

"I think the only way to deal with a man like that is to meet him on his

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own ground, to cow him as he tries hard to cow us."

"Susan, do you mean a police-court, the newspapers, a warrant for arrest, the gossip of the neighbours and all these intolerable things? Besides, what could we say? There is no law against petty malice and persecution, is there? To think that he began years ago when Eric was a child at school; and we are not done with him yet."

"No, we are not done with him yet."

"Susan, so ominous, so prophetic you sound! Say that you don't think he's going to have us watched, followed, spied upon, do you?"

"My lamb, for years and years your courage has been so high. It's not going to droop before a man, a thing like that. And Eric's shoulders are

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broad enough now to carry some of his mother's troubles when they come. That is why I do say that he should know."

"Susan, he must have a quiet mind for this work of his, such a quiet mind."

"For work the quiet mind, for life the courageous soul. Please God, he has them both."

"Susan, I think we shall tell him after all. You always know the best, oh, witch that you are!"

"Not that, just one who cares and cares always."

"You dear! . . . How happy we were, we three! Then this man comes and our fairy castle falls in ruins to the ground. We must build it again and keep it with so much care. Can we

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live behind bolts and bars though and never murmur? ”

“ We shan’t even try, I expect. Malice, maybe, is like love and laughs at bars and bolts. We in our turn must laugh at malice. Or, if that is not possible, then we shall face it—as we have always faced the hours that were not easy.”

And in Susan’s eyes comes the deep quiet brooding look which is hers when she hears the rustle of angels’ wings.

I FIND that I am writing of, instead of to my boy. I set out, at first, to keep a passing record of the years rather than the days of our solitary lives. So little happens on the days, but the years have a tale to tell, it almost seems. I began with the idea that the record would be some day Eric's to keep for love's sake, for guidance, for remembrance. Latterly I have come to think of it as a sort of tribute to Susan, a frail memorial of her faithfulness and care, mine to write and Eric's to read. She sees me now and again at my pages, and always as she does a great content shines in her eyes. But of the pages

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themselves, though they lie loose on the open desk, she never sees a line, nor would she, though they lay there a dozen years. And it is doubtful if I shall ever offer her a sight of them, for it is love, not praise, which makes real to her those splendid words—

“The air of paradise did fan the house,  
And angels offic’d all.”

Praise confuses her, distresses her, one would almost say, but love—love brings no burden with it.

So she thinks it is a book I am writing, a book, she is sure, which will make the busy world stop for a moment and weep the while it reads—or laugh, yes, she is sure it will laugh too, sometimes, so little she knows and yet so much, the dear, who thinks such brave



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things of me, that now and again I bless her passionately in my mind and almost begin to think them too myself.

But when she sits in the same room where I in my corner am at my pages, I notice that she wears her silk apron and only works at her finest work. Once when I asked her about some other work which I knew she wanted to get done, she said—

“No, my lamb, not just here, not just now. My needle can’t do coarse work while your pen’s doing *that*. I don’t know how ’tis, but my needle when it’s doing its best work seems somehow to keep step with your pen, the best stitches and the best words side by side in the room as ’twere.”

What poignancy of pathos, little pen of mine, was in those words to us!

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You and I, we know—know how far we fall short of the silk apron, the fine stitches, and the sainted presence there. Weep inky tears, little pen, at your futile struggles to match those stitches, patient, symmetrical and clean, whilst I, taking all my severity in my hands, say, “Susan, you have paralysed us both, my pen and me. We can never do another stroke.”

But “Hush !” is all she answers, and smiles, and shakes her head.

One of the moments of my life was at this time on the evening of Eric’s home-coming from his holiday with his professor. The meeting after the first parting from one’s child, what else on earth is like it? How good it is for the mother to hold her boy close to

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her, and know that only within the home are arms opened wide to him.

Soon, terribly soon, other arms will stretch towards him, wanton arms, vampire arms, syren arms, and how will he know that their embrace is more cruel than death? How will he know to wait for the arms of love, faithful and undefiled? Will he have to pay a heavy price before he learns that the true liberty is to be master of one's self?

Susan has no fear for him. She says that his instincts will be his guide. And I pray to the God in whom she trusts that she is right. But the things that he must learn, not from his mother, but from life and the world, they are those whose contemplation makes her heart ache, makes her prize every moment of the blissful guileless present,

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moments that no terror of the future can snatch away.

I follow the lectures of Dr. Emil Reich with as much interest as those ladies of a weary aristocracy in the far-off city. Much of what he says is merely exquisite absurdity, but hidden away in this gauze-like texture are all sorts of tender truths and bits of fine philosophy. He has a weighty thing to say on the training of soldiers, and I, at least, like to think that he said it in perfect good faith and seriousness—

“The man who has had the most cuddling, the most kisses, and the most of a mother’s love and tenderness, that is the man who will make a great hero. It is the women who make the men. The man who has not had all this will get tired of a battlefield in half an

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hour. . . . Heroes are men who have been loved by their mothers, kissed by them to any extent. It is not enough for some to have a kiss now and again : they should be kissed continually, five hundred, five thousand kisses : and on the battlefield he will kill five thousand of his enemies."

I am rather glad that the pronouns are not mine, but I am proud to echo the sentiment in every fibre.

Professor Lahgrische wrote to me the other day, suggesting that Eric should join the University Corps of Mounted Cadets and go into training as soon as possible. The value of this as a set-off to close scientific study could not be over-rated, he told me. Also that every lad must know how to care for a horse and use a rifle, not for purposes of attack

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but for those of defence. He had an unsurpassable way of inspiring boys with love of country. When Eric came to me with shining eyes and flushed cheeks, saying, "Mother, do you know that there are thousands of miles of coastline quite unprotected round Australia? And if you don't call that a mouldy shame, what on earth do you call it?" then I knew that Dr. Reich was right and that much love had not spoilt my boy; I knew that his master and professor was right, and that he must have the training without which patriotism itself is helpless in the hour of danger; I knew that it was only I who was wrong, and perhaps Susan with me (for sin in that dear company is lost in grace), that we could not still the aching of our hearts at what—we knew not.

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Without self-discipline, self-sacrifice of some definite kind or another, race decadence so soon sets in, the Professor explained to Eric on his holiday. Also how military training afforded a splendid scope for the acquiring and the practice of these traits. After that, of course, no argument was needed. What was needed, though, was a uniform, a rifle, a pony and accoutrements.

The professor insisted on providing the pony himself. Having no child of his own to present to the State, at least let him give the hire of a pony to some one else's child, he begged, and with such kindly determination, that we found ourselves wishing that we could receive but half as beautifully as he gave.

We held out both hands to this

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Friendship that came unasked, unsought, into our lives. No reluctance or misgiving for a moment was in our mind, we who were wont to shun strangers as alien hosts. Until this Friendship came we hardly knew that it was what we had unconsciously been craving for. Some one to encourage and uplift, some one to bring a sense of gaiety, intimacy, comradeship, alertness into the house, some one that was in touch with everything inspiring and interesting in modern life, everything fine in that other life of the spirit. To welcome him, the doors and windows of our souls opened wide, and a shining flood of sympathy and understanding swept through the corridors and chambers : and one knew with joy that those souls were shy to death and solitary no more.



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But we paid the price—paid it in little coins of anxiety, nervousness, anger, reproach, the small change of life's large dread and the orderings of doom.

One morning, as we sat at breakfast, Susan got up to bring in the post. Eric, as usual, forestalled her, and laid a letter by my plate. "Only one, darling, and such a size. It might be an invitation to a show."

I opened it and read—

*"And so, the day of the new friend is here? Surely, he who wipes the child's nose kisses the mother's face. Eh, what?"*

It was unsigned. I read it two or three times, bewildered, before the identity of the writer flashed into my mind. I was troubled as to whether I should show it to Eric and Susan, but Eric seemed waiting for whatever news

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might be, and I, taking the line of least resistance, I suppose, put the letter first into Susan's hand and then into his.

Susan caught her breath, and scorn lit a fire in her eyes. She had been quicker than I to know who had done this thing. Eric read it first to himself, and then aloud—

“Why, that's Smart's dirty fist! I thought he was dead, buried, and cremated as far as we were concerned. Mother, how dare he, the sneak? How can I find out where he is and punch his ass's head for him?”

Thereupon we told him for the first time of that evening visit, and he was white with anger, and so still, that the sound of his reckless schoolboy vocabulary would have been music in my ear.

“Eric,” I said, “I have an idea that

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this is just what he wants—you to punch his head, as you call it, or some such thing. He tries to provoke Susan and me to wrath so that you may take up the cudgels on our behalf. If he can only induce you to attack him, he will call on the law to avenge him. Or, more probably, as an alternative, he will come cringing here with some unwholesome bargain in his brain as before—that other time, you remember? For our sakes, Eric, don't give him this chance. Don't, dear! He has followed us from the wilderness to the city, it seems; he either spies on us himself, or uses another. Yet nowhere and never in the wide world can he hurt us now, unless in some strange way we ourselves give him the means to do so. That is just what we are not going to do, Eric, isn't it?"

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An hour later he gave me his promise, steadily, sadly, reluctantly. As he swung out of the house to his day of patient work, he turned his puzzled eyes upon me, and, frowning, said—

“Little mother, dear, learning how to defend your country’s a simple job; but learning how to defend your home’s no end of a bally business!”

"SUSAN," I said, one morning, "I have been thinking till my head aches, and I do believe that the only place left where we can lay ourselves down in peace is on a ship at sea. To live between the waves and the sky and to know that nothing from the land can touch us. Would that be the divinest freedom at last, do you think? You look so wise, I believe you know of a better place still."

"Oh, no, my dearie, not that. But what was it that you used to sing—

'Then stay at home, my heart, and rest,  
Home-keeping hearts are happiest.'

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And Master Eric's studies. No ship at sea even would be to him what his University is just now. We wouldn't let a worm frighten us out of our home, anyhow. Often, though, I hear the country ways a-calling. Do you, too, my lamb?"

Her faded, work-worn hands sought mine. Tears trembled in her clear, kind eyes. Life is now and then to Susan a sob that must be stifled in a smile. And she hears the country ways a-calling.

In cities it is what she calls the nakedness of the land that bewilders her. Not the earth that brings forth streets, shops, statues, and great public buildings, but the earth that brings forth orchards, forests, cornfields, meadows, valleys of deep calm and pleasantness—

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there is the earth to which her heart inclines.

And no surer pledge could be given of what the nameless torture of those last two years upon the hilltop was to her and me than in the rush of joy with which we fled from beauteous ways and the things that belonged unto our peace, and turned to walk the weary streets of cities as those who trod the fields Elysian.

And, now, what is it of those fields Elysian?

It is that their comfort is for us no more. In their sweet grasses a snake lies coiled. Poison floats in the fine air. Cruelty lurks in the sunlit ways down which one's heart for a little space sang as one went. Freedom is lost in fear, gladness drowned in apprehension,

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and the fields Elysian are the weary streets of cities yet again.

Sometimes, quite suddenly, we come upon it, upon him, as we turn the corner of a street. If Eric is with me, terror gets strangely hold of me, terror lest he fail to rule his spirit or bridle his hot scorn. If I am alone, I thank God that it is so, and pass quickly on along the busy streets, glad of the contact of my fellow-creatures in whose debt I seem so singularly at these moments. Sometimes for two months we do not see his face, and a hope that we dare hardly whisper to each other begins to softly move within us—until once more, it may be as we leave a church, a theatre, a railway-station, what not, that pitiless presence is there, watching, noting, preying, the embodiment, the



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portent of all that is inhuman and inexorable.

For there is no pretence of the impossible now, no delusion with regard to a friendship that is without the pale, an acquaintance even that is beyond the limits of consideration. That sardonic smile is a declaration of war. Those eyes say: "Good! Since you have chosen—war let it be." And in case there should be any mistake, an unsigned letter comes ever and again to confirm the other tokens. Some shaft, some stab, whose insolence is baser even than its cruelty, is sent in an envelope which one always opens because it is never twice addressed in quite the same handwriting or way.

Plainer than ever before it is to me that one must not let even a constant

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fret or fear take up an undue proportion of one's care. In the well-ordered days of the elect, whoever and wherever they may be, the troubled heart and the spirit stirred with intuition of harm, these lesser woes without the dignity and majesty of grief—surely they are banished to a far perspective, and allowed no place in the foreground of their lives.

And so it must be too with us.

It is the song of the Uplifted Heart that we shall sing.

Work, the world, after all how unobscure and beautiful they are.

“Health and a day!” What more can rulers of empires have?

The bliss that through love is ours.

The felicity that only attainment brings.

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The paths that are on the high hills ;  
the fields that ripen to their harvest  
and stretch away to the shadows of the  
friendly forests.

Honest lives pressing forward to the  
mark.

It is of these, my heart, that we shall  
sing and come into our own with joy  
again.

ONCE more and the mountains are our home.

I see that four years have gone since last this little record of our lives was written down—quiet, busy years, that if they held pin-pricks of poison held no less deep draughts of peace; years that for the rest have no history, that yet, it may be, of all the years that run, are instinct with the whisperings of fate, the furnishing, wise or fruitless, for the encounters still to be.

Oh, my dear, my Bambino, my Little One always, how beautiful you have grown !

As you stood against the skyline this morning over on the mountain side, with

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your rifle on your shoulder, looking intently for quite a space at I know not what, I, watching from the plateau here, fell to adoring that unconscious fine air with which you carry your bare score of years.

Life is so lovely that in my little book I must write it down.

If I could capture this hour as it really is, and imprison it in a few magic words as a musician does the liquid notes of a bird, or a painter the summer wind stirring a cornfield !

But the shining ethereal delicacy of it all, the rare deep silence, the aloofness of these timeless heights, alone the Sonnet of the Master could show their praises forth.

We are here, solitary, on the top of our island world. To the north-east, some sixty miles away, the peak of Kosciusko

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sparkles, higher than we are by two thousand feet. But here is the roof. Kosciusko is but a chimney, rising from a distant slope of the roof. Here we can fare forth for days together, remote, alone, always on the top of the island world.

Oh, beautiful boy of mine, whose grave eyes smile as they meet mine (and more than ever when they see a love-word on my lips), very well you did down there in the world of men and schools, to be sent before you were twenty to make observations and have charge of this isolated meteorological station on the Australian Alps. It is a beginning, a livelihood, work after your heart of hearts, and is bound to lead, if worthily fulfilled, to things of consequence later on.

One sorrow here is ours. Susan cannot be with us. She came in the beginning

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and installed us with all the little tricks of comfort that she knows so well. She gloried in the cloistered life and the enraptured air, but presently her breathing grew difficult ; the altitude then seemed to bring on heart trouble ; she had fits of dizziness and sickness, and with bitter grief she learnt that she could not stay. Her misgiving at leaving us, to me was full of pathos. She only tarries here at all, I sometimes think, to watch over you and me, and she cannot believe that things will still go well with us unless she is close at hand to shut the door on every untoward wind that blows.

She refused to be comforted when I told her that contrary winds could never touch us here. But now she keeps our rooms in the city fair and fine for us and takes care of all the things we love but could not

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transport to these distant places. Twice every year we go there to her when you deliver your reports in person at the State Observatory.

And Sister Nora, of the merry heart, who refuses continual "offers," then wonders wildly why she is not married like nearly everybody else, in the intervals between her cases, makes those rooms her home, and things have thus arranged themselves with a fitness that leaves little wanting.

When Susan had to go we tried a little maid from the valley township forty miles away. For a week and a half she pined and fretted terribly. Nothing could comfort her or stand to her in the stead of the nine brothers and sisters all huddled together in two tiny rooms. The great solitudes hurt her. She thrilled with fear



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at the silence, at the sweeping mists that rolled in like the waves of the sea, hiding heaven and earth and wrapping us in velvet folds of mystery from dawn till eve. Once at the twilight we found her sobbing out her heart on the neck of a friendly nanny-goat. Not even your cheerful "Araminta! By all the stars!" could still such sorrow. So we sent her down again before the winter snows cut us off from the world, and since then have been bold to make no more experiments, but live alone. And for the loveliness of my life I thank God continually.

So still one's soul grows here, so quiet one's mind. All things seem strangely possible. Trivialities drop away. The things which do not matter and which yet encumber one so in cities are here quite lost count of.

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How well we love it, you and I, Mine !  
Oh, but we love it. Not the world where  
men and women quarrel and let their  
hearts grow worn out and ugly with  
jealousy and meanness; but the dear  
world where it seems that such things  
do not come : where all the music is the  
whirr of tiny wings stirring through the  
shimmer of the blue when noon is high :  
where the tender grasses wave, and the  
stars make a lighted temple of the high  
hills and the sweet winds a holy incense  
in its midst.

That Fate, whose favours lie so lightly  
on us, should have chosen us for this life—  
there is the delicious wonder of it day by  
day.

Ninety per cent. of people, if they were  
stationed here, would, I suppose, count  
their lives as dead, lost, useless, benumbed.

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Like little Araminta, terror itself would take hold of them. It seems odd indeed that Fate singled out no one of these, but sent here you and me.

But if Susan read these lines, I know that she would say, "Not Fate, my lamb, not Fate. Professor Langrishe and the Lord!"

Ah, Susan, when the decree of destiny joins hands for a breathing space with one's own passionate longings and instincts, the life blest and beautiful is there, and you, who understand so well, you will gainsay me not.

What time city folk are sleeping fast after their work or play, or pouring out from theatres, shows, and the halls of dance and song, then for Eric and myself it is perhaps the hour to step from the cottage on to the plateau into the icy

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silence of a frozen moonlit world. Below us, into the shining distance, stretch the hills, fold on fold, like petrified waves; and around them cluster the forests of snowy gums, dead and leafless, in close serried ranks, vast phantom armies, waiting a word of command that is never spoken. When I see them in the moonlight, standing stiff and straight for miles, ghostly sentinels about the mountain keeps, they seem part of some spirit-world, and a soft sense of mystery broods around with only friendliness and healing in its issues.

Gentle are the influences, then, that hover round the roughly-built instrument-shed at one end of the terrace or plateau to which we make our way when night work must be done. In these hours I am nearly always outside with Eric, for it may be an instrument to be held or ad-

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justed, notes to be written quickly down, observations to be made with the cloud-mirror or one of the many things for which two are better than one.

My pride rises high when Eric says at supper time something to this effect : "Little Nancy Calendar, how about the Lunar Alps to-night? When the moon is well up, soon after midnight, I want to have another shot at measuring those heights along the great valley. But mind, no rising with the dawn to-morrow!"

Or it may be that we are out in the great dim silent world where ice-crystals are forming and the only sound is the cracking of a twig in the hoar frost, and our study is of that immensity of stars, that radiant belt girdling all the sky, called the Milky Way. And as we wander back to the books and the blazing logs and our

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waiting beds, Eric may say with his most ridiculous air, "Little Nancy Calendar! I do believe her soul is sighing for the city fleshpots after all. She's tired of living in the clouds!"

Then the deep, untroubled sleep of the mountains and the glad rising to another day, which one knows is going to be rich in interest and full enough of work to keep it sound. For here is no monotony.

Estimating the force of the wind, recording the hours of sunshine, calculating the dew-point, ascertaining the temperatures of air and earth—all these things and many more have to be entered in the daily register, the thermometers corrected and tested, the measure of rain or snow taken, and above all, cloud formation to be studied and reported on, this

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being a special feature of the work of the station.

I, who love books so well, I never thought to read the stories there can be in sky and clouds, the pictured stories too. Perhaps the moon is riding in a frosty sky, when light clouds float up from nowhere and veil her glory, making it fairer still. Then, coquettishly, she fastens round her her coloured rings, the Lunar Corona, as Eric tells me carefully to say, violet, silver, orange, amethyst ; and she smiles at us, who, here below, say that her heart is dead, her fires extinct, her valleys void and tenantless. Or the thunderclouds that break and shiver into shreds on these mountain tops, from their massive turrets to their gloomy dungeons, black tragedies of the air, full of passion and grim desperation, fling their bitterness across the

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heavens. At last, when all their anger has sobbed itself out, the light falls aslant; deep cloud shadows, bright-edged perhaps, lie on the hills, and we know that at even-tide there will be peace, and that the things which are not seen are the things eternal.

We walk for miles and never know that we have walked a yard, so light is the air in these high-lying places. When the food supply is low, Eric takes his gun and shoots a rabbit or a hare, or very occasionally a small moorland bird. Rather than trap our dinner, we would go hungry for a week. There is a flock of goats belonging to the place; all the milk we have is goat's milk, and the tinkle of the bells on their necks is in perfect tune with the monastic atmosphere that impregnates everything around.

I cannot say whether I love best the



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winter or the summer here. Both are beautiful beyond compare. In the winter, perhaps for nearly five months we neither get a letter nor see one fellow-creature, and our anxiety is for Susan always. In the summer every fortnight bring us a message or a word, and things are well with us indeed. But when the snows melt and the first packets reach us from the far-off world, then indeed we are like two children for excitement and for fun.

I remember at one of these seasons I was reading in the ingle-nook by the fire. Eric had just finished a paper on some astronomical question and his abstraction had not quite faded away.

“Listen !” I told him. “Down in the world a new thing has been born since you and I were there. They call it a Suffragette.”

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“A new star, did you say? What are her dimensions? What hemisphere is she swinging over? Has she come to stay?”

“God bless her! It seems so,” I said, when I could speak again.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is the summer now, the summer when, if I write at all, I seem as if I must dip my pen in gold—in the liquid gold, the peace, the dew of the hopes and memories that are born upon the mountains.

Astronomy smiles kindly, they say, at poetry. So Eric smiles on me.

The angels held high festival and there was a banquet last night in heaven. The sky was full of stars, a network of jewels on a ground of filmiest blue. Here and there little clouds of silver muslin brushed softly across the azure. Eric was working outside, faithful and sleepless, watching the nebulae in the region

## The House of

of the Southern Cross. Where I see only a white shimmer of glory, his eye, trained to the finer spectroscopy, is exploring the glittering suns of unsuspected worlds and star clusters. I left him alone with his instruments, but sat outside on the terrace in case he might be wanting me. When his work was done he closed the door of the shed and threw himself beside me on the short crisp turf.

In the dim light I saw his face, with the tense expression which silent enthusiasm inspires, and I knew that he had been in heaven reading the secrets that are "writ in the jewelled cypher of the sky."

I wondered if something new had come within his range, but forbore to speak, remembering how far spent was

## Broken Dreams

the night and how deep must be his weariness. His head was on my lap and my fingers rested idly on his hair. Presently I knew that he had fallen fast asleep.

With a bound I was back in the years that had gone. It was a troubled little head that took its sleep in my arms, for a schoolmate lay dead, and it was my boy who had brought this thing to pass. Susan was with me then, tending the fire and reading words of mercy and understanding from her Book of Books. For some moments life grew dark and piteous again on that terrace under the high stars, and I wished that Susan were with me still.

What seemed a point of light kept dancing very far away in some hollow. It would vanish, then flash again. I

## The House of

watched it till it stopped altogether, vaguely troubled, until I remembered that it was perhaps what they call the Will o' the Wisp, or some such marsh-land token, for of human agency I knew that it could scarcely be.

The short-lived night wore on. The waiting world grew slowly white, and a tenderness like nothing I have known before was in the air. With a thrill I understood that the dawn was close, and feared that in the warm splendour my boy would wake. A poet might have sung in chosen words to that lustrous radiancy to come veiled and delicately along the margin of the mountains: but a mother, what can a mother do? She is blest indeed if she can think, as I thought then, how good it is to be alone with her child, in some tabernacle

## Broken Dreams

lifted high above the world, where only peace and love do enter in.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kids were born to four of our nanny-goats last week. Two of the little things have been snatched up by hawks already, and the disconsolate mothers refuse to browse or rest, but languish sadly. This havoc has been going on for some time. Eric and I watch those hawks, a pair, circling round and round in the still, pearl-white sky. He proposes that we shall walk by a trackless way over the ridge, down into one of the fastnesses where perhaps their eyrie is, for he is going to shoot them if he can get a decent aim.

“And that’s much too good for them,” he says, remembering the bodies of the slain goats which it has sometimes been

## The House of

our lot to find, with their eyes and tongues pecked out, and the life not yet quite gone.

I love the trackless ways upon the mountains. I always fall to thinking of those pioneers in every land who left the open road for the wilderness of virgin solitudes, and with torn feet and bleeding hands went out to meet the doom that crouches in the fearful, hidden ways. But for those strong hearts in the van, where would be to-day the sweetness of the tracks they left behind, the worn tracks along whose sides the grass is tender, flowers spring up, and homes cluster? But for them the lights would not be shining in the little windows and the children playing without fear in the clearings now.

And as they suffered then, so it is



## Broken Dreams

written down that they must suffer too, who, in the world of men and cities, get beyond the outposts of tradition and convention. How bleak for them the way, how hard the stones, how bitter the pointed finger, the averted look, the dull lack of understanding ! But, who shall say ? from the seeds of their despair may spring forth fruit a thousandfold.

\* \* \* \* \*

We went by the trackless ways, Eric and I, this afternoon. We walked along the ridge on either side of which the island-world slopes down, on the north to the warm, on the south to the frozen seas. We wandered into shady hollows where mosses and ferns cluster gloriously together, and the leaves of the snowy gums rustle and sparkle in the breeze. We looked into abysses and wild, mys-

## The House of

terious depths where the gloom was as darkness visible. We saw a black buzzard circling round, and presently heard him drop with a scream on some unfortunate lizard, snake, or field-mouse : but of the hawks and their strongholds we saw no sign at all.

As we went we talked of our high hopes, of the time when we shall start for California to see the spangled skies through the glass whose greatness and whose fame is noised abroad through all the world.

“But, Eric,” I told him, “I’ve been thinking that you and Professor Langrishe shall go together. His heart is set on this holiday. Susan and I will wait for you at home and write you letters and think of you every minute of the time.”

“Not so, little Nancy Calendar, not so !

## Broken Dreams

You and Susan shall come and dwell like ladies of high degree among the pink and silver blossoms of the orchard villages that nestle in the *canyons*, while Langrishe and I pursue our pilgrimage a few miles further on to the temple where Science is equipped for her work and for her labour as she ought to be—but near each other, always, little mother, while we can.”

We were resting against a boulder, scarcely a mile from home, and with our terrace in full view across the gorge, when Eric got up and took out the small field-glasses which he always carries with him on his walks abroad. After gazing through them intently for some minutes he handed them to me.

“Look,” he said, “away over about four or five miles, by that sort of thicket

## The House of

at the bottom of the St. Bernard crags, do you see anything ? ”

I looked long at the point he signified.

“ Surely,” I told him, “ isn’t it smoke, a tiny column of smoke ? ”

He took the glasses back from me and looked again.

“ Yes,” he said, “ smoke it is. Who the deuce can be camped there unless it’s some old sundowner considerably off the track.”

“ Ah ! ” I remembered, “ it would be there, or just about, that I thought I saw a light or lantern swinging in the darkness, when you fell asleep by me on the terrace, the night before last.”

“ You did ? And you didn’t tell me ? ”

“ It was so far away, I couldn’t be sure. Besides, I really never thought of it again till now.”

## Broken Dreams

“By Jove! a murderer, fleeing from justice, could dodge pursuit for no end of time among these wilds if he only knew a thing or two, couldn't he?”

“Eric! how horrible!” I cried, shivering. He flung his arm around me.

“Little mother,” he laughed, “it's just occurred to me that what we take for smoke may perhaps be steam. For there's not the faintest sign of a tent or swag, or human being. It may be the bed of a morass drying up, or there may be a hot spring down there. Simply great. The Saint's Spring—miracles while you wait. Anyhow, we'll go down in a day or two and explore the mystery for ourselves.”

And so, laughing, running, vastly satisfied, we set our steps towards home.

\* \* \* \* \*

## The House of

All yesterday the mists embraced us, invested us with a thousand dear caresses, encompassed us with a wordless softness, a quiet that never could be spoken. Though we were able to look for neither the hawks nor the sainted spring, we were not idle : we were absorbed in flying our kite and taking cloud temperatures at different heights. We got most interesting results, and Eric said it was a day such as he had long been waiting for. This morning the mists are with us still ; but they show signs of lifting, and there is promise of a gorgeous day.

Have you ever looked through the open window of a mountain cottage on to a world of mist and cloud where you can see nothing, not even the roses on the lawn or the lilac at the gate? A

## Broken Dreams

melancholy sweetness is everywhere, and in the stillness you could hear a leaf drop. You begin to wonder are you of or in the world at all, and then there comes a sadness which does not hurt, a sadness to which you open wide the door of your heart. Suddenly, piercing the silver shroud, comes the note of a lark, flying high into the hidden heaven and singing gloriously as he flies. So, an hour ago, it was with us. Ah! but life is good.

I seem to remember a morning once before like this. But then I wanted the little bird to stay his song while my boy slept yet a while. But now I hear him, that same boy, grown so tall and fair and good to look at, and he is calling joyously—

“Come out, little mother mine, come

## House of Broken Dreams

out! The clouds are scattering all to pieces, and you'll never in your life see a finer thing than the way the mountains are shining out and shaping. . . ."



SUSAN has brought my book and pens and laid them on the table.

“Write, my lamb,” she bids me—“if only just a little, write. There’s nothing else to do. And the hours won’t seem so long. I shall bring my fine sewing. Then the night comes soon again.”

She looks so frail and old. There is nothing I would not do to please her if I could. But this—to write—does she quite know what she says?

Where had I got to? What was it? That it was good for us to be there, my boy and I? Ah! that life was good? I wrote that—I?

I remember. Yes. He called to me,

## The House of

and I went out to the splendour of that awful morning and waited while the world grew calm and radiant for the sacrifice. As we stood together on the terrace, we noticed once more the two hawks circling overhead, hungry for their prey after long tarrying in the mists and clouds.

Eric ran for his rifle. "Look, dear," he called to me, "I'm not going far, only to the other side of those boulders. I have an idea that with patience I shall get a decent aim."

As I watched alone, Mr. Smart, the schoolmaster, arising from nowhere, yet seeming to come from behind the cottage, walked towards me. I suppose it was the horror, the shock that was in my look, that angered him, for he said—

"Did you think, indeed, that you had

## Broken Dreams

done with me? Didn't you understand that you never will have done with me?" then flung a foul word at me, and in his madness shouted it yet again. At the sound of his coming Eric rushed forward, heard the word, levelled his rifle, and shot the man dead almost at my feet.

We knelt down to feel his pulse and heart, flew inside for brandy, but knew in a few moments that what was done could never be undone or changed for ever. We lifted him inside, a burden terrible to bear, straightened his limbs, folded his hands, and left him lying in the strange chill peace.

Then Eric came and knelt by me, and his face was as I have never seen it before.

## The House of

"Oh, little mother-love, what have I done to you!" he said.

"No, no. I to you, darling, I to you."

And for an hour, locked in each other's arms, it was all we said.

I sometimes, now, think that was our last goodbye. But it is a thought that strangles. I may not think it, yet continually I do.

How frail and old she looks, Susan, sitting by the window there! She has not worked a single stitch. Her fine sewing is wet with tears.

\* \* \* \* \*

That was yesterday. Little book, what mockery it is for me to sit and fill your clean pages now, in these quickly-flying days when Eric John Calendar lies in the city gaol, less than a mile

## Broken Dreams

from here, awaiting his trial for the wilful murder of Thomas Smart, school-master—my Eric, honest, clean as daylight, down whose path the Future beckoned shiningly, till Fate stepped in and with one mocking blow laid all that fair fame in the dust.

And I see Justice pointing its finger towards the dead. His life, such as it was, was dear to him too, perhaps, and in one moment it was torn from his body, which now cries aloud for vengeance. And the last words are among the truest that he spoke: "Did you think, indeed, that you had done with me. Understand that you will never have done with me." How right he was! His is the victory which endures.

After that hour upon the mountain, the hour which all the world cannot

## The House of

take away, we wondered, Eric and I, what we must do.

“Shall we die now, together, Eric?” I asked him. “Will you shoot me and then yourself? We are both quite ready.”

His beautiful face flushed, and I think tears swam in his troubled eyes.

“Little mother,” he said slowly, “that is too easy a way—too easy both for you and me.”

After that I did not speak the wild thoughts that held me from moment to moment as to how we could cover up this fearsome thing, but listened while he said—

‘I shall ride down now to the telephone station, dear. The old mare will do it within three hours. I shall merely say that something untoward has hap-

## Broken Dreams

pened, and get them to send up a mounted constable or sergeant of police with a conveyance. Then I shall at once ride back here to you . . . and . . . and . . . we must prepare to go down again all together. But you'll be alone, little mother-love, for six hours. There's no other way. Sit on the terrace, dear. I shall be back before the sun sets."

I watched him ride away. He kept turning back to me. Oh, my love, my love!

Before the sun went down he came again. He told me that he had taken the bridle track, and that the others, with a pair-horse drag, would be up within the hour. He said that he had wired to Susan to expect us, to expect me, on the morrow. Arm in arm we

## The House of

went to feed the old mare, who would now be turned out to grass. We said goodbye to the goats, and gave the last lettuces to our favourite ones. We then went to the instrument shed and looked together at the instruments—fine, costly, delicate, and true. Some of them were his own. Should we take them with us to that world we had forgotten so far below the stars? Neither asked the question, but once he whispered—

“Just my spectroscope . . . and . . . the micrometer, I think, do you?”

It was that he was still my little child; once more it was the toy he loved, the toy that went with him to bed and lay all night folded in his arm. But just beyond, lay the dead, calling for the vengeance which is justice.

Coming slowly up the green turf way



## Broken Dreams

we heard the drag, the horses labouring after their toil of nineteen miles. All the anguish of this present was driven home to me in the first glimpse of those white-helmeted officers.

Before Eric went to meet them he said : "Never be afraid, dear. It was all gloriously worth while. And just one last promise while we are alone together. That word he said—you are not to tell it ever. It is never to be spoken. Say that he insulted you, insulted both of us, causelessly and grievously. I can bear anything on earth but hearing that word passed from lip to lip in a court of justice. And it won't make a scrap of difference to the issue, not a scrap. Promise me, dear mother-love, who more than understands."

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## The House of

Last night, at ten o'clock, Eric was sentenced to death.

There are three weeks, they tell me ; three weeks and two days.

\* \* \* \* \*

Six of those days have gone. It is the night-time, when we cannot sleep, Susan and I. The old, she says for herself, want so little sleep, "but you, my lamb," she adds, "must have it or you will fail." So she takes me to the table where the little book and pens are waiting, for she thinks my help lies there. But if I cannot pull down prison gates and walls and save my own, how then can I write?

The lawyers, Professor Langrishe, and Eric's student comrades, are working like giants on his behalf. They tell me that I can do nothing, nothing but try to

## Broken Dreams

comfort him when I am allowed to see him through the iron grille. They tell me that everything that can be done or thought of is being done. They tell me that I can do nothing.

In his summing-up, the judge, with that clear sanity which falls so dully on the sense of those at bay, dwelt on the idea that fists, not a rifle, would have more than sufficed: from the fact that the rifle was used rather than the fist he drew the deduction that murder rather than punishment was the object. With a refinement of cruelty that seems hardly credible, he also dwelt on the fact that it was not the first, but the second, time in Eric's life that much the same thing had happened. Eric, than whom a gentler lad the sun never shone on, was, for the ends of justice, I

## The House of

suppose, or to make out a case for the Crown, subtly shown to be of quite another temper.

In other lands, in other times, he would have been acclaimed a hero for the deed. But here and now, because he arose in his haste to defend his mother, he must die the death.

When you were a little boy, maybe I should not have read to you, as I did, those fine bright pages of the heroes who avenged their womenkind at the point of the sword without first thinking if it meant their own death too. I should not have fed your mind on brave chronicles without end, where knights and saints only lived to defend their own—you, who would go out with your baby sword and look in dim leafy ways for the lion that was prowl-

## Broken Dreams

ing round to eat up Susan and me, and were never glad till you had slain it, and we, who loved that baby bravery so !

\* \* \* \* \*

Without a word to any one, I went to the Governor who is to consider the sentence in Council. I hardly know how I got to him or what I said when there. I begged till I was faint and voiceless. He kept on saying that he must be guided by his ministers. Yet he seems almost as if he would be kind. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

The summer is dying and it is airless all around. But it mocks one less than the sweet shades of woodland trees might do. We hardly speak, these days, Susan and I. Sometimes I sit on the floor with my head on her lap as Eric used

## The House of

to sit with his on mine. Or she rests leaning against the sill, while her agonised eyes strain always towards where he waits. She has been once to see him, but she may not go again.

“Dear Polar!” he whispered, before they parted. “Dear Polar! So much more than all the angels you are to her and me,” . . . and then said nothing else.

She and I were standing at the open window of an upper room. From the street below warm, ill-smelling exhalations floated up; the cracked asphalt bubbled on the pavement; motors rushed and puffed along; a little organ-grinder with a monkey on his shoulder turned his handle and kept his merry eyes upon us. Susan threw him a coin and his smile was for another house at once.

## Broken Dreams

At last we heard them, the newsboys, crying out the evening news—

*Persia Quieter.*

*Decision of the Council in the Mountain Murder.*

*Remarkable Scoring at Christchurch.*

Can hearts stand still and the body live? I held her in my arms, for she seemed to be tottering. We tried to shut our ears to the screaming of the boys. But at this moment the Professor ran up the steps from the street. Straight to us he came, where we stood by the window. The news he had hastened so to tell—he did not tell it. Then, I think it was, we knew.

Presently, we heard him, saying hoarsely—

“There have been three reprieves

## The House of

following quickly on each other lately. It seems it is against the public good to grant another. In my heart of hearts, I believe this is why Eric goes."

There is an agony so deep and still one wonders, is it peace?

I may see him once more, they tell me. Just I, alone. After Saturday, he may look on no earthly face again unless it is the governor's, the chaplain's, or the warder's.

I know that there is nothing—nothing to be done. I see that huge machinery of the law, like a Juggernaut advancing slowly, steadily, to crush us. I know that nothing, that no one, can stop it now. On Tuesday morning at the stroke of ten we must lie down to be broken underneath it. The might and



## Broken Dreams

majesty of Imperial Law, they cannot change their course for Eric and for me. And this is Friday.

From the beginning Fate has been too strong for us. How strangely she has worked for our undoing! We have been her sport, her playthings, born to be broken on her wheel.

When life was beautiful beyond words for us, the sword was hanging overhead to slay, though we never dreamed of it.

Three death sentences one after the other are cancelled.

A boy holds a lighted match to a dog's nose on a school playground nine years ago.

A man by a schoolhouse fence sees my wretched body, from which I have torn the burning clothes.

On frail pegs such as these Fate hangs

## The House of

the decrees that crush and grind and stupefy for ever.

Had I only died when my child was born! But I was fain to live, that I might guard and care for him as never child before was guarded. And, at bottom, it is I who have brought him to the pass where now he lies. I! And one sits still and lives.

When he was a baby, there were verses that once I read, that kept ringing for days afterwards about me. Then I forgot them; but now, after all the long while, I hear them again—

*“Oh, couldst thou slip away,  
Now by the hawthorn hedge of Death,  
And get to God by day!”*

It was a mother—not blind to life's black terror, as I was then—a mother singing to her babe.

## Broken Dreams

But it is Susan who is distraught, at bay with all life, for the first time in her own.

For the first time she is powerless to help. Before, in her anguish, she helped her dearest down the steep path of death ; she held their twitching, clammy hands in hers and bade their fear be not afraid. But now there is nothing she can do. Her passionate prayers fall back upon her heart. The God who might have heard them and shown such heavenly mercy—but where is He ?

Ah, Susan, you can only draw the curtains of the desolate room, so that the great sky mocks us no more with its crowd of stars into whose bright eyes my boy's eyes look no longer.

I shall not see him again. My eyes,

## The House of

that must look on a thousand thousand faces yet before they close, may not see his again for ever. I went to him on Saturday. There are things, little book, that I cannot tell you, though I sometimes feel you are a living thing, part of myself, so much of my agony has dropped on your white leaves and stained them as with blood. Joy? Was joy laid down, with frightened fingers too? Yes. It is true, little book. There were joy and peace surpassing knowledge. Sometimes I think we ran back into those dear green fields that we might spring the better into the black abyss waiting ever on the further side. I do not know, and it does not matter now.

To-night Susan and I keep watch by the dying, whom yet we cannot see or

## Broken Dreams

touch or whisper one last word to.  
You shall hold his letter, the letter that  
was brought to me by hand this evening,  
and then, little book, you shall hold no  
more.

H.M. PRISON,

*Monday, September 4th.*

MOTHER,—The Governor has just been in. He says that I can spend the morning in writing undisturbed to you. Also he has said that not a word of the letter shall be made public, and that it shall be delivered to you personally by special messenger during the day. He looked very troubled. And Johnson, the warder, sitting at the other end of the cell, with his face turned away from me, seems as much put out as if I belonged to him. Johnson is a very decent sort, and now and then, later on, darling, I should like you to see him.

## House of Broken Dreams

There might be things you could do for him or his. His wife is dead. The eldest boy has a taste for mechanics. And the little girl of thirteen keeps the house spick and span, mothers the children—and the rest. It is very hot. You are so near to me, as I write, that I can almost hear your heart beating. All this day I should like to be a little boy with you again—the little boy you were never weary of or angry with. Oh, mother, what days they were! How well the world went then!

“Angel of heaven!” I used to call to you, “angel of heaven, come out and see the first primrose!” Do you remember?

But of course you do. Angel of heaven you were to that little boy, and a thousand things besides that he never

## The House of

has and never will tell you now. How you taught him to love flowers, trees, horses, dogs, stars, birds, books, fields, everything that was wise or pleasant, and to hate all cruel things and mean. And if you had him at your knees again you would teach him just the same ; and if life were as it was before, he would do as he has done and be lying still where now he is.

It is no use my telling you not to grieve everlastingly, is it, dear ? Every day at ten in the morning, wherever you may be, I see you being crucified afresh for me. On the top of that, can I tell you to travel, to go to the mountains where your healing was before ? You and I, who know each other's souls so well, needless things shall not be said between us now.



## Broken Dreams

When Susan came the other day to take leave of me, I did notice, dear, how trembling, how aged, she has gone. This grief is killing her. She has taken care of you and me since I can first remember things. The time has come now for you to take care of her. I leave her in your charge. And I know that I can ask nothing of you that you will not do for me in measure running over.

You were always such a comforter. The rare essence, the genius of comfort, was yours. Such a gift, little mother mine, you must not let it die for want of using. All the more, because no comfort can avail you now, I want you to comfort others in that splendid way of yours, as perhaps they never were comforted before.

## The House of

I want you to go to those beastly slums and find out here and there little children whose lives are being undone by continual torture of one sort or another. And I want you to take them to your heart till theirs grow strong and glad again. Susan thinks that this thing to come will kill you.

“Master Eric, dear, I do fear so for my lamb yonder,” she sobbed the other morning.

Darling, she is not going to fear for you. No one is going to fear for my mother, high-hearted lady that she is.

“Behold the fir-trees, how unswerved they are !

\* \* \* \* \*

Shall I bear myself less royally than they ?”

There is all my legacy to you, those little lines. In my shame and in your

## Broken Dreams

agony, for I must die but you must live, are we expiating some far-off sin in one of our race for which the final coin has never yet been paid? Heavy things are on my soul and I see how meet it is that I should die, but you, my sinless dear, you too are called upon to pay the price. To know your agony, and that it is I who have laid your high heart in the dust, all the bitterness of death is there. But if I know that all is going to be well with you the bitterness will be clean wiped out. And something tells me that I shall know, through the sympathy which makes us one, that things are going with you as I want them to. I shall hear you whispering: "Eric, Eric! Yes, yes. Just as you say!" At the last minute, dear, I shall hear just that and nothing else.

## The House of

There are no end of things I want you to do for Dick Cleeve. I needn't tell them to you one by one. You know them, as you know everything. That is where those little beggars in the slums will have a show at last. You always *know* so divinely. I was sorry for Dick from the start: it was such a rotten home life, his. And Miss Franks? Will you see to her too, dearest, because (I feel a beast to put it this way) she does care for me very much. All the big joys have passed her by I should say, shouldn't you? But, by Jove, she does hold out both hands to the little ones. And we love her for it, don't we?

Then there's Nora, Sister Nora. Really, mother, I was in love with her once, probably am still—for there's never been any one else, as they say in books

## Broken Dreams

or city streets. But I was too many years on the wrong side of her, and she grinned brutally when she first saw me in long trousers. No, it would never have done. I have an idea that you will be a friend of friends to her. And she worships the hem of your dress, which is a good foundation on her side. Langrishe knows that I want him to have all my books and instruments and drawings and private notes. If you or he ever come across a fellow quite hard up and keen on the same things that I was keen on you'll give him a hand, won't you?

While here, it has come home to me so strongly what really fine things law and order are. No nation can live without them ; and in the skies too, stars, planets, meteors, all the heavenly host, they move in beautiful obedience to hidden principles

## The House of

and powers. I offended against the law. I took a life. I am not, unless for your sake, regretting that I took it, but this I do say, that having taken it, I must pay the penalty without flinching. And you with me, dear, with me always. This is where it hurts, that I cannot pay alone.

Do you remember, when I was a little chap on your knees, how I used to wish and wish that if ever we had to die at all, we might both die on the same day? And now it has come to this. So much of you will die with me to-morrow morning, but what is left, maimed though it is, I want it to be a thing of splendid consolation for others in the shadow.

Do you remember, on the mountains, how sometimes we would think that there we could stretch no hand directly to any forlorn little brother or sister? The

## Broken Dreams

mountains, mother ! The things we felt and thought and learned there ! It was there that we said goodbye—not in this cell, on this paper ; but there, where my little mother's arms were so tight and sweet around me. The only thing that matters now, dear, is to be strong and lovely right up to the end. Perhaps it comes sooner than you think, mother-love of mine.

ERIC.

P.S.—Kiss Polar for me, often.

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